

Morality in language:

Condemnation of abortion in the comment sections of
American conservative news websites

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract Tutkielma analysoi abortin moraalista tuomitsemista yhdysvaltalaisen konservatiivisten uutissivustoiden kommenttiosioissa kriittisen diskurssianalyysin näkökulmasta. Tutkielma hyödyntää evoluutiopsykologista käsitystä moraalista, jolla pyritään ymmärtämään miten ja miksi abortti tuomitaan. Kokonaiskuvan saamiseksi laadullista ja kriittistä näkökulmaa tuetaan tutkielmassa määrällisin menetelmin. Moderni evoluutiopsykologinen teoria esittää, että moraalikognitio on biologinen sopeuma, joka vähentää konfliktitilanteiden vahingollisuutta. Jos ulkopuoliset ihmiset valitsevat puolensa riitatilanteessa esim. perhe- tai ystävyssuhteiden perusteella, tilanne saattaa tasaväkisyydestä johtuen eskaloitua. Toisaalta kun yhteisö määrittelee moraalisäännöt, se kykenee kokonsa puolesta helposti rankaisemaan normin rikkojaa uhrin hyväksi. Normien vakiinnuttaminen vaatii sen, että moraalikognitio toteuttaa mallia, jossa määritellään väärä teko, sen tekijä sekä uhri. Tätä viitekehystä hyödynnetään tutkielmassa hypoteesien laatimiseen siitä, miten abortti moraalisesti tuomitaan: (1) abortti esitetään pääosin teonsanoja käyttäen ja teonsanoiksi valikoidaan jo valmiiksi laajalti tuomittuja tekoja kuten <i>murha</i> , (2) abortille määritellään uhrit ja niitä inhimillistetään (esim. <i>alkio</i> vs. <i>vauva</i>) ja (3) abortille määritellään tekijä eli moraalisäännön rikkoja. Lisäksi tutkitaan inhoon sekä rankaisemiseen liittyviä ilmiöitä. Aineisto koostuu 365:stä tuomitsevista kommentista aborttiaiheisiin artikkeleihin sivustoilla <i>Breitbart</i> , <i>The Daily Wire</i> , <i>The Washington Times</i> ja <i>The Western Journal</i> . Kommentteista erotellaan sanat, joilla aborttia, uhreja ja tekijöitä kuvataan sekä miten inhoa ja rangaistushalukkuutta ilmaistaan. Lisäksi tutkitaan yhteyksiä esim. teon- ja uhri- ja uhri- ja uhri- esiintymien välillä hyödyntäen Excelin loogisia funktioita sekä AntConc-korpustyökalua. Analyysi osoittaa, että abortti tuomitaan aineistossa pääosin ilmaisuin, joissa se esitetään <i>vauvan</i> tai <i>lapsen murhana</i> tai <i>tappamisena</i> , jonka mahdollistaa abortteja tarjoava järjestö <i>Planned Parenthood</i> tai <i>demokraatit</i> . Teonsanoja käytettiin tuomitsemiseen 82 %:ssa kommentteista. Uhriin viitattiin 77 %:ssa kommentteista sekä tekijöihin 53 %:ssa. Tekijöiden suhteellisen vähäistä määrää voi selittää se, että käsitetasolla teon vääryyden perustelussa on tärkeämpää määritellä uhri kuin osoittaa teon mahdollinen tekijä. Lopuksi aborttia tarkastellaan moraalikognition suhteen sosiaalisena ilmiönä, jonka tuomitsemiseen voi vaikuttaa ihmisten eriävä seksuaalikäyttäytyminen ja jonka kriminalisoinnilla voi olla tärkeitä yhteiskunnallisia vaikutuksia.		
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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Background.....	3
2.1. Critical discourse analysis (CDA)	3
2.2. Evolutionary psychology (EP).....	5
2.2.1 EP in CDA: explanations, evidence, and implications	6
2.3. Morality	9
2.3.1. What is morality?.....	9
2.3.2. Moral cognition: actions, victims, perpetrators, disgust, and self-interest	11
2.4. Previous research.....	17
2.5. Summary.....	22
3. Material and method.....	23
3.1. Material.....	23
3.2. Method.....	25
4. Results and analysis.....	30
4.1. General characteristics of the corpus.....	30
4.2. Action and non-action	31
4.3. Victims	34
4.4. Perpetrators.....	37
4.5. Disgust, punishment, consequences, and other minor observations.....	39
5. Discussion.....	42
5.1. Summary of results, relation to previous research, and limitations.....	42
5.2. Biology in being critical	47
6. Conclusion.....	50
References	52
Appendices	62
Appendix A. Lexical items used in condemnation.....	62
Appendix B. Articles and URLs.....	68

List of tables and figures

Table 1. Balancing outliers.....	27
Figure 1. Ten most common action items.	32
Figure 2. Frequencies of the top five action items in COCA.	32
Figure 3. Ten most common victim items.	35
Figure 4. Ten most common perpetrator items.....	37

1. Introduction

The issue of abortion maintains a roughly equal divide between American adults into those for and against (Pew Research Center, 2017; 2019; Gallup, 2018). Due to this split it seems that the debate will not be settled soon and arguments often get intense. Indeed, the stakes are high: do restrictions on abortion rights wage war on women's human rights, or are they there to stop mothers-to-be from murdering their babies out of convenience? Extreme as these views may sound, both do receive representation. My focus will be on the latter, looking at how and why abortion is morally condemned. This study utilizes an interdisciplinary framework connecting a cognitive account of morality with a quantitative corpus approach.

By and large, abortion is seen as a moral issue in the US. In a 2017 report (ibid.), only one third of Americans said that abortion is not a moral issue, leaving a majority believing that it is. Moreover, just under half think that abortion is wrong, and 66% of conservatives think abortion should be illegal in all or most cases (Pew Research Center, 2018a). As will be seen, the conservative perspective often sees the fetus as a human being whose rights the state should have an interest in protecting. Since these views potentially influence legislation, they are consequential for *everyone*, not only pregnant women. This is because the legal status of abortion is associated with a variety of secondary effects (WHO, 2019), and because people's moral opinions can change depending on their circumstances—both of which will be discussed later.

The above and the lack of cognitively oriented approaches in previous research on abortion discourse make the moral condemnation of abortion a worthwhile topic for study. The material I use comes from the comment sections of abortion-related articles on various conservative news outlets: *Breitbart*, *The Daily Wire*, *The Washington Times*, and *The Western Journal*. These websites were chosen as material because they represent the pro-life position and commenters tend to strongly condemn abortion. I will combine an evolutionary psychological (EP) theory of morality with a critical discourse analytic (CDA) framework in order to make hypotheses about how abortion is condemned. A contemporary EP account of morality suggests that it is a coordination mechanism that enables people to assign the property of *wrongness* to specific actions, and to punish perpetrators in favor of victims. In addition, the emotion

of disgust can be implicated in making moral judgments. More precisely, the research questions are:

- (1) Is condemnation more likely to be expressed in terms of unambiguous actions than non-actions (e.g. *murder* vs. *evil*)?
- (2) How often are victims identified in comments, and are they humanized (e.g. *embryo* vs. *child*)?
- (3) How often are perpetrators identified in comments, and are they groups of people (e.g. *Democrats*)?
- (4) Is disgust expressed, or do commenters attempt to elicit disgust in others?

A parallel goal (but not a proper research question) of this paper is to argue that an understanding of human evolved cognition can benefit critical approaches because critical research by definition makes claims about people's behavior in social settings.

Throughout the paper, by *abortion* I mean the procedure as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018, p.2): "...abortion is defined as an intervention performed within the limits of state law by a licensed clinician...that is intended to terminate a suspected or known intrauterine pregnancy." I will also use *fetus* to refer to the object of abortion for two reasons, which should not be taken to reflect dehumanization or any other personal bias. First, *object of abortion* is a rather clumsy phrase to use repeatedly. Second, *fetus* is a more accurate description because almost all abortions in the US are performed during the first trimester (ibid., p.1). *Baby* and *child*, on the other hand, also refer to born humans and are therefore less prototypical for this purpose.

The thesis is structured as follows. Section 2 explains the framework of CDA, the theoretical underpinnings of EP, and how they might be combined. I also present the idea of morality as a biological adaptation which serves to coordinate social action in fitness-enhancing ways, and review the relevant empirical findings. These are then used to formulate hypotheses about what linguistic condemnation should look like. Section 3 describes the material used and how it was examined using a fundamentally qualitative approach supported by quantitative corpus methods. Section 4 presents and comments on the results. In Sections 5 and 6 I evaluate the results and the limitations of the study, relate morality to possible sociopolitical implications including CDA itself, and finally consider paths for further research.

2. Background

In this section I describe the goals and commitments of CDA as a socially oriented approach to the study of discourse. I also review some of its limitations. After outlining the theoretical underpinnings of EP, I discuss how it can be applied to language research. Then, based on EP theorizing grounded in an abundance of empirical work, I explain what morality fundamentally is, how human moral cognition functions, and how that should manifest in language use. This also lays the groundwork for discussing some of the social implications in Section 5. Finally, I review some previous results on abortion research and relate them to my framework.

2.1. Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

This study is situated within the larger framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA attempts to uncover how linguistic means can be used to gather and exert power in society and politics. *Power*, in CDA, does not usually mean physical power, but rather the capacity to influence other people's minds by discursive means (van Dijk, 2015, p.466–469). From this perspective, politicians are an example of powerful people because they speak publicly and can draw significant media attention. Indeed, discourse analysis focusing on political discussions is a very relevant object of investigation since CDA takes an explicit political stance in attempting to “challenge social inequality” (ibid., p. 466) and prioritizes historical change with respect to social issues (Fairclough, 1993, p.137).

I will use the word *discourse* as synonymous with “spoken or written language use,” while focusing mostly on its social nature (ibid., p.134). Language use does not typically occur in a vacuum, but is instead a form of social influence in part constructed upon the speaker's ideologies or motivations. For example, news can be seen “not as a reflection of reality but as a product shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces” (van Dijk, 2015, p.477). A naïve view of discourse may consider it to be a matter of cooperation by exchanging information and truth-seeking arguments, but sometimes we are motivated to distort the relationship between language and reality. One could describe abortion as *murder*, for instance, or they might argue that

abortion relates to the mother's *freedom to choose* for herself. Van Dijk (2015, p.473) suggests that metaphor and lexicon can be used in ways like this by the speaker to reinforce his views.

Since CDA aims to expose and ultimately alter societal power relations, it often focuses on discourses whose purpose is to represent groups of people in negative ways which can be used to justify and perpetuate the subordinate status of these groups. Sometimes the surface representations can be conspicuous. For instance, refugees and immigrants can be depicted as *asylum shoppers* (Moore, 2013) or as a burden to national resources (Hart, 2013) for the purpose of furthering anti-immigration agendas. Similarly, Caldas-Coulthard & Moon (2010) showed how British newspapers describe men and women differently and argued that this can uphold harmful gender stereotypes. But sometimes, it is argued, the superficial features of language can seem unprejudiced and yet serve a discriminatory agenda. For example, whereas explicit references to ethnicities may not be mentioned in discussions about the possible costs of immigration, they can nonetheless be motivated by racist ideologies (van Dijk, 2000a; 2000b). The devious aspect of this is that specific types of argumentation can exploit unconscious cognitive biases which predispose us to make commonsensical but logically invalid inferences (Hart, 2010, pp.73–80; 2013). These correspond to what are sometimes called *opaque* effects in CDA (Fairclough, 2013, p.28). While I do not focus on language effects, abortion and the politics surrounding it are a matter of power; as I will discuss, the function of morality is to place limitations on other people's behavior.

CDA does not only aim to describe the ability to use language to create power structures or how speakers use language to further their aims; it is also explanatory (Fairclough, 2013, p.42–43). This is why it may adopt ideas from other disciplines. But it is not always clear how well the claims about language causing social effects are justified. Chilton (2005, p.22) asserts that CDA has been unsuccessful in producing any real understanding about how humans interact with language, which, given the *assumption* that language use is a significant factor in human social issues, is at the very least problematic. Accordingly, “[n]ext to nothing is known about whether [nominalisations or agent-less passives, or intertextual cross-overs] do really have any cognitive effects and thus social action effects” (ibid., p.45). Jones (2007, p.338) has

put forth similar criticisms, arguing that the tools of “conventional descriptive linguistics and pragmatics” are simply inadequate for making claims about complex social relations. Indeed, “the grandiose claims CDA practitioners have made about the augmented or pre-eminent role of language in society have never been substantiated or even coherently explained” (ibid., p.356). This might be taken to suggest that CDA could be strengthened by empirical evidence or insights from other disciplines which are successful in explaining human behavior.

Whatever role language plays in human social interaction, it should be kept in mind that any effects language use may have are mediated by our minds. Therefore it seems that understanding human cognition is essential in analyzing the relation between language and society: “[c]ognition is the necessary interface that links discourse as language use and social interaction with social situations and social structures” (van Dijk, 2015, p.472). One way to attempt to understand language use and its interplay with cognition and social issues is to apply knowledge about the organization of the human mind to the examination of discourse. What has organized the human mind, is evolution.

2.2. Evolutionary psychology (EP)

There have been recent studies showing how evolutionary psychology (EP) can be used in analyzing language features and explaining their potential effects on people (O’Halloran, 2005; Hart, 2011; 2013). EP is an interdisciplinary field connecting evolutionary biology with cognitive science (Cosmides & Tooby, 1997). The basic premise of the discipline is that because our bodies are the result of evolutionary pressures, the same must apply to the brain and mind. Biologists may often focus on the evolution of animal morphology, speciation, etc., but evolutionary psychologists are interested in the evolution of human cognition: why is it that a specific faculty of the mind exists in the first place? The field centers on *adaptations*: these are psychological mechanisms that have been selected for in evolutionary history because they helped our ancestors in reproduction and survival. These adaptations are called *modules*, and they correspond with neural circuits in the brain (Ermer, Cosmides & Tooby, 2007, p.154).

Some examples of modules are those related to fear and anger processing. Fear is a response to threats—predators, heights, natural catastrophes, etc.—and it facilitates aversion through several bodily, perceptual, and other cognitive changes ultimately for the purpose of gene preservation (Cosmides & Tooby, 2008, pp.118–119). Similarly, anger is elicited by cues signaling disregard or harms to one’s welfare and it enables us to correct the behavior of others (ibid., pp.131–132). Both psychological responses, therefore, predispose us to respond to the environment in adaptive ways. The postulation that the brain consist of modules which have their own respective domains of function is called *massive modularity* (Carruthers, 2006).

Modularity is the orthodox EP view where the mind consists of a myriad specialized units carrying out operations and sub-operations related to perception, emotion, motor control, reasoning, learning, etc., and these units may not share information with one another. While there have been some suggestions for development in this regard (Bolhuis et al., 2011), in the context of this paper it does not matter exactly to what degree the mind is modular. It is enough that the mind is evolved, and that the activity of modules is not mutually transparent across the mind (Kurzban, 2010, pp.57–68). This means that we are not conscious of the mechanisms by which our minds operate, and often the rationalizations we give for our behavior and opinions are generated *after* they have been acted out or on. The implications of this fragmented view of mind become relevant in the section on morality, especially with respect to self-interest.

2.2.1 EP in CDA: explanations, evidence, and implications

Hart (2013) presents a theoretical example of a possible convergence between CDA and EP. Evolutionary psychologists hypothesized and then tested the idea that evolutionary pressures in ancestral times have shaped into human cognition a mechanism which specializes in tracking social contracts. A social contract specifies some requirement one must satisfy if one is to accept a benefit from someone else. The mechanism’s purpose, then, is to track how people follow such contracts, and to predispose individuals to punish “cheaters,” who are free-riders that collect the benefits of social practices without satisfying the requirements (Cosmides, 1989, p.196). A modern example could be people who collect welfare and are not attempting to get employed. This *cheater detection* mechanism was postulated to have evolved

because selection pressures for cooperation have been continually high, and indiscriminate altruism should be a design feature that would be out-competed by exploitative strategies (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992, p.164).

The main line of evidence for this mechanism's existence comes from a paradigm employing the *Wason selection task*. In this task, subjects are given a rule and asked, based on logical inference, in which of the given cases the rule has been broken. The results showed that when the content of the rule represents social contracts as opposed to something else (for example letters and numbers, and other familiar situations) people's performance, i.e. correct answers, jumps from roughly 25% to 75% (see Cosmides & Tooby, 1992; 2005; 2007; Cosmides, Barrett & Tooby, 2010 for discussion). Hart (2013), then, focused on representations of immigrants as free-riders in the media, suggesting that activating the cheater detection module by this means may affect people's attitudes towards them.

In addition to providing explanatory potential, EP theories may also alleviate the possible complications caused by the politicization of CDA. Ultimately, how language use and human behavior relate to one another is an empirical question, and adopting a political (or indeed any) bias as the foundation of research is unscientific. Why should CDA be an exception (Chilton, 2005, p.21)? O'Halloran (2005, p.1946) claims that CD analysts tend to be "left-liberal," which can affect the objectivity of analyses in at least two ways. First, those (potentially harmful) discourses that confirm the analyst's bias may not receive critical attention because the political goals are shared. There is, then, no motivation to expose the ideological motivations behind them. This could lead to a situation where most critical work focuses on right-oriented discourses. A second issue is that analyses themselves could become biased if analysts "[hunt] for ideological structures" (Matheson 2005, p. 19) and see them even in places where none exist. A final irony is that the political undertakings of CDA may be or become "'naturalized', and hence be seen to be commonsensical and based in the nature of things or people, rather than in the interests of classes or other groupings" (Fairclough, 2013, p.35)–the very thing CDA is attempting to expose in the first place. This is especially relevant if CDA cannot justify its central values (Chilton, 2011, p.799). Insofar as it is feasible to use EP theories to make predictions about language use,

those predictions are likely to be more resilient to biased interpretations because they have to be tightly anchored to our understanding of evolutionary forces.

Despite the explanatory and political impediments, it is possible to empirically demonstrate language effects (at least in restricted settings) that could enable us to speculate that these effects translate to social effects. One finding relevant to my work is that lexical manipulations between the terms *fetus* and *child* can affect people's attitudes towards abortion (Mikołajczak & Bilewicz, 2015). This set of studies first gave people surveys designed by the experimenters concerning the *fetus's/child's* development, and then their stances on abortion were interrogated. It was found that "those presented with the term foetus were more allowing of the abortion for non-medical or non-legal reasons than those presented with the term child" (ibid., p.505), and one of their other studies indicated that this was because people attributed more *humanness* to *child*. This is just the type of evidence that would be required in CDA to make worthwhile claims about social effects. As Saurette & Gordon (2013, p.179) note:

...it is crucial for practitioners of discourse analysis to clearly identify what their studies can demonstrate (i.e. which techniques a given discourse uses to persuade its audience) and what they cannot (i.e. the motivations or "true beliefs" that guide the speakers of that discourse). We can, of course, develop hypotheses about the individual motivations or beliefs of political actors from discourse analysis. But to truly investigate those elements rigorously, we require a variety of other methodologies as well.

Research such as Mikołajczak & Bilewicz's (2015) could indicate two things: that writers consciously attempt to use lexical choices as a means of persuasion, or that they are exhibiting their honest perception of the world. Given the selection of newspapers I will be looking at, persuasive efforts may appear to be a curious explanation for the language use in their comment sections because these papers could attract a reasonably (politically) homogenous readership. This is why I will also take into account the function of morality as a coalitional signaling mechanism, mainly for people's political orientations or social opinions.

For the above reasons I will direct most of my focus on making hypotheses based on the knowledge available on human moral cognition. My purpose is not to make claims about the social effects of language because they are difficult to get a grip on, and I will not adopt a political stance because it may interfere with the objectivity of the analysis. However, CDA is an appropriate framework since in my view social change is consequential; not necessarily with respect to people's political views, but to the quality of arguments and discussion that is had about the topic of abortion.

2.3. Morality

2.3.1. What is morality?

As discussed, in the CD analytic tradition discourse is seen as a central factor creating social inequalities in society: groups holding different ideological beliefs struggle to gather and maintain social influence through language use in order to create power imbalances that serve the naturalization of their discourse. In the abortion debate (and also in general) it is worth paying attention to the question of *why* people fight for such power in the first place. There are certainly many situations where people can profit economically by persuading masses of people, such as in the case of advertising. However, it is not obvious how banning abortion is in the best interests of those who want to ban it—unless those people are planning to run the black market for abortion once they get their will and the procedure is outlawed. Why is abortion a moral issue in the first place?

There are two ways to think about morality. The first one is the philosophical practice of asking questions about the meaning of words like *right* or *wrong*, and what it is that constitutes *goodness* and why people should be striving for such a thing (Driver, 2007). The second one is the primary focus of this paper: it is the tendency of people to judge something as right or wrong, form (political) coalitions around shared moral beliefs, and exert social power in order to modify the behavior of others who are perceived as transgressors or non-invested third parties (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2013). It is the evolutionary account of why human cognition was adapted to perceiving perpetrators and victims, being motivated to involve oneself in the conflicts of others, and signaling one's moral beliefs to them through language use and punishment (violence, shaming, ostracizing, and so on). From here on out, for the purpose of

clarity, I will use *morality* to refer to the propensity to condemn (etc.), and *ethics* to refer to the philosophical pursuit of seeking real truth into matters about right and wrong, insofar it is possible.

While morality as construed above is the main concern in this paper, it is first necessary to define some key concepts in the ethical framework I adapt here. Otherwise it would be impossible for me to discuss specific arguments for and against abortion, and much less any societal ramifications they may have—which is relevant to CDA.

One way that ethics can be thought of is *deontology*, which standardly focuses on rules about actions (Alexander & Moore, 2016). This means that a certain action can be wrong even if it brings about good effects, and conversely an action can be right even if it causes needless suffering. In contrast to deontology, *consequentialism* is the view that the rightness or wrongness of an action should be judged based on the consequences it brings about. In this framework, the consequences are standardly measured as anything that increases the conscious experience of well-being, or happiness (such as in utilitarianism): “acts are right just because they maximize the overall amount of well-being in the world” (Shafer-Landau, 2102, p.120).

However, it can be argued that concerns of happiness and adhering to rules are mere matters of opinion. If someone does not mind continuously lying to others, who is to determine that he is doing anything bad? Ethical realism is the position which states that it is possible to be right or wrong about ethical claims, in the same way as it is possible to be right or wrong about any other factual claims. This means that ethical truths are not subject to varying opinions. For example, torturing somebody can be said to be *objectively* wrong even if the torturer in question sees nothing condemnable in his actions. One (and conceivably the only) way to establish ethical truth is to link it to a property which is intrinsically valuable and in principle measurable: well-being (see e.g. Harris, 2010, pp.28–37). This may allow us to get past some differences of opinion, for if it can be empirically demonstrated that following some precept leads to mass happiness with no foreseeable downsides, it cannot be objected that such a scenario is only one’s subjective belief. Of course, discussions about ethics are everything but simple and uncontested. But as this is not a work of philosophy, the previous short summary will have to suffice.

Quite distinct from philosophical pursuits is morality as a biologically grounded phenomenon. In whatever way nature endowed us with the capacity to moralize, there is no reason to expect that our moral intuitions lead to happiness for everyone; they need only assist us in survival and reproduction. Therefore in order to posit moral cognition as an evolutionary adaptation, there must be a fitness¹ benefit to its development. My framework is largely based on DeScioli & Kurzban's (2013) proposition that morality should be viewed as a coordination mechanism: when people can agree and signal condemnation with respect to moral principles before a violation occurs, this can reduce fitness costs stemming from 1) escalated (physical) conflicts where people choose sides and recruit defenders based on kinship, friendship, etc.; and 2) the corruption of hierarchies where people side with the higher status individual. In the former case, costly physical conflicts may be likely because disputes are evenly matched and there is no obvious underdog who is likely to back out. In the latter case, the high-ranking individual can exert his power arbitrarily on others, which may lead lower-ranking parties to form an alliance and physically retaliate. When coordinated, however, moral precepts are *impartial*: they do not depend on the identity of the transgressor or victim (Tooby & Cosmides, 2010, p.220). Therefore the transgressor is unlikely to initiate conflict because he is outnumbered by the community (and may be unlikely to break moral rules in the first place due to conscience: see DeScioli & Kurzban, 2009, p.290). Treating morality as a coordination mechanism puts constraints and expectations on how human moral cognition should function. These guide the analysis of my data, and are explained below.

2.3.2. Moral cognition: actions, victims, perpetrators, disgust, and self-interest

A central feature of moral condemnation—judging something to be wrong—is the fact that it is not solely directed towards welfare consequences, but also significantly towards *actions* (see DeScioli & Kurzban, 2009, pp.292–3; 2016, pp.772–4 for review). For instance, the so called *trolley problem* has been used to examine people's moral intuitions. In the experiment, subjects are asked whether it is permissible to

¹ The concept of fitness has been defined in various ways, some more mistaken and confusing than others (Dawkins, 1989, pp.181–194). Since details of biology are not relevant to this work, it suffices to regard fitness (rather imprecisely) as reproductive success.

divert the course of a trolley which is about to run over five people onto another track on which it will only kill one. In this version, almost everyone (90%) judges it permissible to divert. However, 90% of people judge it as morally wrong to push a man off a bridge stopping the trolley on its way to kill five people, even though doing so would be a welfare gain, just like in the previous version of the problem. This makes sense given the idea that coordination requires it to be guided by a shared representation of a behavior, and is not therefore only aimed at reducing harm (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2016, p.779).

Not only are actions often privileged in moral judgment, their commissions are seen as more immoral than omissions, even when the welfare outcomes are identical or worse (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2009, pp.291). An interesting observation is that while people's welfare estimates appear to track welfare consequences quite accurately, this is not the case for their moral evaluations. Therefore it is unlikely that moral rules act only as simplifying strategies in the service of ease of computation (ibid., p.289). With respect to the abortion debate, to be morally consistent, at least in the consequentialist fashion, would be to judge abortion² to be as immoral as choosing not to have children. This is because in both cases the child-to-be is robbed of his potential life. However, if the human moral machinery is especially attuned to actions, this difference may not be wholly surprising: not having children is an omission, whereas having an abortion is an action. From a computational perspective, this makes sense:

...everyone is always omitting to take an infinite number of actions. With few exceptions, attaining a meeting of the minds that one omission out of this amorphous set is uniquely immoral is far harder to cognitively arrange than is the joint identification of a mutually objectionable act of commission. (Tooby & Cosmides, 2010, p.225)

² It is perfectly reasonable to argue that a baby not yet born in the final stages of pregnancy is a real victim because it is able to experience suffering. Yet abortion is very often seen as categorically wrong, including even the cases of some days old embryos. In this context, I am talking about only the clearest cases, sets of some hundreds or thousands of cells, where we know this organism cannot be hurt and therefore victimized. For comparison, consider that the brain of a fruit fly consists of about a hundred thousand neurons, which are, unlike an embryo, organized into a complex nervous system (Chiang et al., 2011).

It appears, then, that actions are more relevant for morality than their consequences and non-actions, which leads me to assume that this is likely to be reflected in language use: condemning abortion should be mainly expressed using action words.

Much like actions, victims appear to be a fundamental part of morality (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2016, pp.778–779). Whenever wrongness judgments are made, people also appear to perceive victims almost invariably (DeScioli, Gilbert, & Kurzban, 2012). However, this is also the case for victimless offenses, suggesting that identifying victims may have a covert purpose beyond protecting others from harm: “Perhaps some victims [society, dead bodies] are not real people but are merely puppets used by condemners to further their strategic aims” (ibid., p.149). For the purposes of persuasion in the condemnation of abortion, it seems intuitive that *embryos* are not as impressive as victims as *children* are, and the same goes for *abortion* or *termination* as opposed to *murder*. The fact that moral argumentation is constrained by the plausibility of the justifications given for one’s position (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2014) could account for the argument about a child’s potential, since embryos are not children.³ Simply put, if an act harms an embryo or a fetus—especially if they are seen as non-human—it may be more difficult to justify that it is wrong compared to if it harms an actual child. Furthermore, to appear concerned about the object of abortion is a way to signal that one is not motivated by reasons of self-interest, but rather by the victimization of *others*—and given the modular organization of the mind, people may honestly believe this about themselves (but see Kurzban, 2010, p.194). The same works the other way around as well, where those who want abortion to be legal may argue using laudable concepts like “women’s equality and rights” (Bourgeois, 2013, p.30) instead of simply acknowledging that it is very convenient to be able to terminate an unwanted pregnancy safely and without fear of punishment.

In order to dole out punishment in favor of the victim, the mind must represent a perpetrator as well (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2016, p.778), and sometimes these representations correspond to groups (Tooby & Cosmides, 2010, p.206). This happens

³ It is sometimes suggested that human life begins at conception, and therefore even embryos can technically be considered children. However, assigning human status is irrelevant to the reality of possible suffering: whether or not embryos can feel pain does not depend on us calling them children.

especially in political issues, since political affiliation is predictive of convergence of actions and attitudes within the group. Hence, the perpetrators in abortion issues may not always be only the women who undergo the procedure, but whole groups of people who support its legality, such as *Democrats* or *liberals* (even while there is, obviously, disagreement within these groups). The group itself may then be seen as an agent as the result of a categorization process: when enough people are similar in a group with respect to some property, that property may stereotypically be assigned to everyone based on group membership (Pinker, 1997, pp.308–10).

There is also some reason to believe that people might employ disgust elicitation as a means of moral persuasion. The emotion of disgust evolved for the purpose of pathogen avoidance, which can be looked at from two perspectives. First, we recoil from rotten foods, body products, etc. which carry the risk of being infected by disease-causing microorganisms (Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 2000, p.640–1). This could be taken to suggest that the purpose of disgust is to prevent us from ingesting harmful substances. But a second parallel idea (and not necessarily a fully compatible one: see Rottman, 2014) is that disgust originally evolved to avoid specific *people*, and not so much disease-ridden materials (Park, Faulkner, & Schaller, 2003, pp.67–9; Schaller & Park, 2011, pp.99–100). For example, the physical appearance and behaviors (e.g. sneezing and having abscesses, sores, open wounds, etc.) of others may act as a cue signaling the risk of infectious disease.

Tybur et al. (2013) suggest that the function of disgust as a mechanism for pathogen aversion may have been co-opted for the purpose of morality to signal judgment and coordinate action. Disgust can be implicated in moral judgment in at least two ways: actions that do not pose a threat of pathogen transmission may elicit disgust and be moralized (ibid., pp.73–74), and on the other hand, there is evidence that eliciting disgust is linked to increased moral condemnation (see also DeScioli & Kurzban, 2016, p.783). For example, being exposed to a bad smell can induce people to more heavily condemn consensual sex between first cousins (amongst other things: see Schnall, Haidt, & Jordan, 2008). Moreover, disgust sensitivity appears to predict condemnation in at least some domains, such as homosexuality (Inbar et al., 2009), and it is also associated with more conservative attitudes towards abortion (Inbar et al., 2008). Therefore, whereas people might describe abortion as disgusting,

persuasive efforts are more likely to be more successful when the procedure is described graphically in an attempt to elicit a disgust response (though this could be more effective when done visually). If disgust is a crucial part of moral cognition, signaling condemnation of abortion should manifest as vocabulary like *disgusting* and its loose synonyms (e.g. *repulsive*), and attempting to change the minds of moral opponents or third parties should highlight the gruesome details of the procedure. If people implicitly appreciate that the audience of the comments they leave is likely to politically agree, the former should be more prevalent than the latter. However the link between disgust and morality is not totally clear. For instance, the causal evidence available has not clearly demonstrated the domain-specificity of disgust with respect to moral judgment (Pizarro et al., 2011). Therefore the focus I put on disgust is more observational than predictive.

Moral condemnation does not only carry out the function of coordinating punishment. It also enables coordination *before* conflicts; it is a signaling mechanism. Expressing condemnation linguistically—as opposed to, for example, physically punishing someone—is a relatively uncostly signal to send others in an attempt to recruit collaborators. This is because physical punishment carries a higher risk of physical retaliation and condemnation from others—and in modern times, given a serious enough attack, the state may interfere and place the punisher in prison. On the other hand, posting condemnatory messages online is quicker, safer, and legal.

Because alliances are powerful (especially in an ancestral environment), we are motivated to form them around shared moral beliefs (Tooby & Cosmides, 2010, pp.207–208). Crucially, political action and attitudes appear to be a notably strong force in alliance formation, and the mere expression of political opinions can act as a probabilistic cue that predicts cooperation and coordination should a conflict arise (Pietraszewski et al., 2015, p.29). In this light, some (or much) of condemnation should be repetitive and devoid of argumentative quality, since one need not attempt to persuade someone whose interests and opinions are already in line with theirs. It could also be that the intensity of condemnation is linked to its credibility: someone who is rather indifferent about abortion and talks accordingly is not expected nor likely to involve himself in the conflicts of others due to potential social costs. But someone who aggressively demonizes transgressors and then backs out stands to lose face and

suffer the consequences—for example as a politician who promises one thing and does another after gaining power. In fact, there is evidence using the forementioned Wason selection task that people are good at detecting traitors who betray the commitments of the coalition (Sivan et al., 2018). Moreover, demonization and other forms of harsh condemnation are unlikely to persuade the opposing side because they are inherently antagonizing and may incite anger (see p.19). Therefore, because the newspapers I focus on are conservative and the readership is expected to politically align, commenting can be expected to be homogenous. For a signaling purpose it is enough that one only expresses his views with no persuasive efforts.

Finally, for the purposes of connecting the social implications of the way moral cognition is organized to CDA, the role of self-interest needs to be discussed. The mere logic of evolutionary selection hints at the possibility that people should be motivated to strategically enforce rules that are in their best interests, and oppose those that interfere with them (Tooby & Cosmides, 2010, p.218). Weeden & Kurzban (2014, pp.75–85) suggest that because a high-commitment monogamous life-history predicts negative attitudes towards abortion, banning the procedure can be a way to inflict costs on others with more relaxed mating strategies. Conversely, of course, whoever opts for a more promiscuous lifestyle will benefit from having the least possible costs to the consequences of his actions. Simply put, promiscuous moral precepts are (biologically) threatening to those betting on a single relationship, and moral rules that judge and punish promiscuity are costly to promiscuous people. The logic of this idea is so well put by McCullough et al. (2012, p.563) that I will quote them at length:

For men in particular, the high fidelity/parental investment strategy is undermined by men and women who pursue promiscuous sexual strategies because of the attendant reduction in paternity certainty, which raises the fitness-reducing prospect that faithful males are allocating parental investment to children who are not their offspring. For women, a high fidelity/parental investment strategy is undermined by men and women who pursue promiscuous sexual strategies because of the attendant increase in the risk that men will abandon their mates and withdraw parenting effort from their offspring with those mates. Therefore, natural selection likely favored the evolution of a mating psychology that causes people to enact social behaviors that put them in contact with individuals who are pursuing similar sexual strategies—as well as a psychology that motivates them to punish or ostracize individuals in their midst who appear to be pursuing rival strategies.

Therefore, what could motivate some anti-abortion arguments is not so much that abortion is *really* wrong, but other people's sexual behavior.

The previous explains why there is a tension between intuitive ethical realism and self-interest. This is why we use discursive means—amongst others, like violence—to try to persuade others of the rightness of our moral views. But our arguments are not persuasive if we are perceived to be motivated by pure self-interest, not least because others may or may not jump on board for their own self-interested reasons (Kurzban, 2010, pp.214–6). Indeed, there is evidence that people rather egregiously modify their moral views if such modifications yield them more benefits, but importantly the justifications they give for their behavior are limited by plausibility constraints (DeScioli et al., 2014). Moreover, in a luck-based economic game, winners were more likely than losers to judge the outcome of the game as fair when the starting position was unequal and worked in their favor (Molina, Bucca, & Macy, 2019). However, if the purpose of morality is to coordinate action, it cannot be based on pure self-interest since said interests are virtually never perfectly aligned, and others will not agree to following rules that put them at an unfair disadvantage. Therefore coordinating action requires that moral rules be viewed as universal and invulnerable to personal opinion (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2013, p.486). This would also mean that even if self-interest largely explains the condemnation of some actions, the justifications given should reference victims other than self—though in order to be plausible they should also be, at least superficially, connected to some commonly shared moral precept. Rules against murder, theft, etc., are good candidates for universality because everyone can be murdered or stolen from and therefore everyone can benefit if such rules are upheld (ibid., p.488). Disagreements arise when the interests of different groups are in seemingly stark contrast, for example with respect to wealth distribution. Self-interested political action veiled by justifications such as *fundamental freedoms* or condemning the *murdering of babies* is further discussed in Section 5.2.

2.4. Previous research

Previous research on abortion discourse has focused on argumentation and ideology, women's experiences, and the political and social issues around the debate. Saurette

& Gordon (2013) found that in the anti-abortion discourse in Canada (e.g. by politicians and organizations) argumentation that focuses on abortion causing harm to women is characterized by a larger word-count than “fetal personhood” arguments. Harms to women mean physical or mental complications, such as depression, being caused by having an abortion. Fetal-centric arguments highlight the status of the fetus as a person, where abortion is seen as a direct violation of its rights. Saurette & Gordon (2013, pp.172–4) interpret the larger word-count indicating more “weight,” meaning emphasis and persuasive effects. However, this may also be a consequence of how the human moral cognition is organized. If people are rule-oriented “Kantian” reasoners (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2013, p.479) who require action and victim cues to guide their moral judgments, it may not be surprising that more efforts are put into consequentialist arguments about the potential harms of abortion to women.⁴ These arguments may simply be less intuitive and therefore more difficult to justify than pointing to the fetus as a victim of the act of abortion. As noted earlier, it is essential that moral judgments enable people to coordinate action in punishing perpetrators in favor of the victim. The “abortion-harms-women” arguments are, then, further complicated by the fact that in them the woman is both victim *and* perpetrator (see also *ibid.*, 2013, pp.285–6).

Reflecting the idea that moral opinions often precede or are disconnected from their justifications, Dillon (1993) studied the discourse of pro-choice and pro-life groups in the US and concluded that “[t]he abortion debate...is a highly emotional one and involves a clash between disparate worldviews” (p.312). Given the complex nature of the ethics of abortion, this may be a surprising finding. But if self-interest motivates moral reasoning, and we are often unaware of why our moral views are what they are (wrong things just *feel* wrong and therefore they *are* wrong: see Haidt, 2001), it could be expected that argumentation surrounding abortion rights is less than sophisticated. The function of morality as a signaling mechanism contributes to this as well: if one’s purpose is to simply broadcast moral attitudes to others, they need not be justified. It would also be expected that if self-interest is a significant factor, we should be resistant

⁴ For instance, rules such as *do not kill*, *steal* or *lie* feel more familiar than *do not cause physical suffering*, *distress related to loss*, or *emotional discomfort originating from betrayal*—perhaps because it is easier to construct a shared representation of the former.

to acknowledging and much less adopting opposing views. Indeed, the emotion of anger evolved specifically to modify the behavior of those who do not appear to sufficiently value our welfare, and it predisposes us to inflict costs to, or withhold benefits, from them (Cosmides & Tooby, 2008, p.131–2). If access to abortion is relevant to one’s welfare, others’ attempts to restrict said access could incite anger (and vice versa). Demonizing one’s antagonists may then be adopted as a strategy in attempting to impose social costs on them. This may lead to further retaliation, creating a feedback loop which manifests as a highly emotional debate where opposing sides are not responsive to argumentation.

Limitations on abortion rights indeed appear to be experienced as highly threatening. Sharma et al. (2017) report, in a study of over 700,000 tweets, that among the top hashtags in “For Abortion” messages is #waronwomen.⁵ Moreover, anger words were more common in the pro-abortion ideological category than any other. In line with my framework, anti-abortion tweets focused on “fetal personhood and abortion as an act of violence against the life of [the] fetus” (ibid., p.21), whereas pro-abortion tweets highlighted women’s rights and choice. Unsurprisingly, anti-abortion tweets also invoked religious precepts (and religiosity, too, is predicted by and relates to people’s reproductive strategies: see Li et al., 2010; McCullough et al., 2012; Weeden & Kurzban, 2013).

Consonant with how alarming restrictions on abortion rights are seen as is the observation that women may often express relief after the termination of a pregnancy (Kirkman et al., 2011, p.124). Interestingly, women can also feel guilty about their relief, and this might be connected to how the object of abortion is conceptualized (see also Khan & Shah, 2016, pp.10–15). These conceptualizations range all the way from “just cells” to “child” (Kirkman et al., 2011, p.125). Whereas the lexical item *child* is often invoked in arguing against abortion, it can also be used as a justification *for* abortion in a very similar fashion: abortion may rob the future child of its life, but it can also save the future child from a life of disadvantage and difficulty if the parents, for whatever reason, are unfit to care for their offspring. There is no doubt that these

⁵ Note that the hashtag does not reference a war on rights, even though #rights and #reprorights were also common. This might be because *women* better fit the victim slot in the mind and are more impressive as such.

kinds of justifications are often legitimate, but it should also be recognized how they can be used to mask self-interest. It can be explicitly recognized and even given as a reason for abortion that having children can derange one's life, but in order to shift focus from this inconvenience it might be highlighted that one is also—or only—motivated by the future child's welfare.

The idea that women have abortions for self-interested reasons is not mere cynical speculation. Wiebe et al. (2005) studied “antichoice” (p.248) women's reasons for and views on abortion. Women were considered antichoice if they would not allow others to have an abortion in all cases ranging from social reasons to rape and health risks. As this is quite a broad definition, the women were further interviewed in order to gain better insight into their attitudes. It was discovered that women allow abortions in their own circumstances, but not others' (see also Beynon-Jones, 2017, pp.226–7). For instance, “not being ready” may be seen as a better reason for abortion than not wanting more children, or if a birth defect is likely (Wiebe et al., 2005, p.249). Sometimes the reasons for and against may even overlap. For example, one woman gave having “no money” (ibid.) as one of the reasons for her abortion, yet said that not being able to afford a child is *not* a good reason for abortion. This seems perfectly in line with one of the consequences of the modular mind: an act can be seen as wrong and yet committed, followed by some rationalization for why the moral precept does not apply in one's own case. Some part of the mind wants to enforce a moral rule, another wants to break it, and a third is left with the job of justifying the contradiction (Kurzban, 2010, pp.59–62). Importantly, Wiebe et al. (p.250, emphasis added) note that

[a]s these women who held antichoice views had all undergone abortions themselves, it is obvious not only that one person cannot make that choice for another, *but also that no woman can make that choice for herself until she is facing an unwanted pregnancy.*

In this case, shifts in attitudes appear to be motivated by self-interest, not ethical commitments.

Although women's experiences with abortion have been studied, their lack in pro-life and conservative discourse surrounding the issue can be seen as a problem having political implications. O'Rourke (2016, p.42) points out in an analysis of political abortion discourse in Australia that "[w]hat is excluded in these debates is the subjects/agents voice of the women seeking abortion." Some conservative politicians were then free to depict these women as irresponsible, promiscuous, and acting out of convenience. As expected, it appears that the discourse was also characterized by vocabulary such as *killing* and *baby*. Similarly, pro-life efforts in Canada describe the object of abortion as a *child*, and where *fetus* and *embryo* are used, it is suggested that they be included in the definition of *human* (Bourgeois, 2013, p.25).

Bourgeois (2013), too, reaches the conclusion that the absence of women's perspectives contributes to their marginalization—though in the next moment she notes that "[t]here is no mention of the male role within reproduction, pregnancy, or abortion" (p.29). Indeed, as Sharma et al. (2017, pp.6–7) discovered, the woman's right to choose is a main focus in pro-abortion discourse (at least on twitter), whereas men's involvement does not receive attention. The same is also highlighted by Bourgeois (2013, p.30): "no one should have the power to control how or when women make choices about their bodies."⁶ Does this type of discourse marginalize men by undermining their role in pregnancy and their ability to affect the decision about abortion? One might believe that the male perspective is (prominently) pro-life and therefore, obviously, present in pro-life discourse, but this is not true: sex alone generally does not predict attitudes towards abortion. In other words, men are as likely to support the legality of abortion as women are (EKOS Research Associates, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2017; 2018b).

⁶ *Choice* sometimes acts as a curious justification (it is simply stating the fact that women can make the choice to have an abortion), and other times it is something that need not be justified at all, perhaps reflecting that abortion is not seen as a moral issue in the first place. Insofar as "substantial" (Bourgeois, 2013, p.23) access to abortion involves using tax funds—as is the case in Canada—it seems perfectly reasonable to insist that such spending is well justified. This is why Bourgeois' claim is missing a piece: abortion is not *only* about women's choices and bodies when other people are involved in financing their procedures.

2.5. Summary

I have assumed a straightforward connection from how we perceive and interpret the world to language as a means of communicating our beliefs and attitudes. But we do not speak only for the sake of exchanging ideas. The purpose of moral condemnation is to send a signal about who one is likely to align with in a conflict, coordinate punishment in favor of the victim, and attempt to enforce moral rules which are beneficial to oneself. While any evolutionary adaptation has to develop due to the fitness *consequences* it brings about (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2009, p.288), this does not mean that the mind should be able to represent them. The consequences of an action can be impossible to track to their finality because they pan out indefinitely. For the same reason, it is also difficult to build shared representations of consequences. This could be one reason for why we rely on action cues—which are easily observed—in making moral judgments. For instance, if sexual infidelity is condemned and punished in the community, this can lead to more paternal certainty and deliver a fitness benefit—even if the consequences of infidelity are not *always* detrimental (Trivers, 1972; Buss, 2000, pp.52–53). Observed actions, then, can act as useful heuristics that when reacted to lead to *good enough* fitness outcomes (Johansson, 2005, p.17). This insight could be used to predict that moral transgressions are more often described in terms of unambiguous actions rather than welfare outcomes or through adjectives.

Since victimhood appears to be closely associated with moral judgment, people are expected to point to victims—even non-existing ones—affected by transgressors. And to make their case more impactful, the status of the victims may be strategically elevated (in this case by humanizing them, e.g. *embryo* vs. *child*). Victims can also be used to veil self-interested motivations. Agency as perpetrators may be given to whole groups of people instead of only those committing the act. Disgust can be expressed as a simple signal of condemnation, and its elicitation may be used as a means of moral persuasion.

A more conventional CD analysis might point to discourse features that are common in conservative discourse on abortion, assume that these features have social effects, and conclude that such effects are detrimental. Bringing about social change with respect to any social issue requires that the issue in question is *socially* understood. Unless some understanding of human psychology is introduced, it should seem

mysterious why some people want to ban abortion, and why they keep resorting to the same linguistic tactics when they are unlikely to be persuasive. It is not enough to simply condemn some type of discourse as problematic and leave it at that. This is especially the case when the rightness of one's own views is taken for granted, which is why I do not adopt a political stance in this paper. My analyzing conservative discourse should not be taken as an indicator that I am "pro-choice," and my writing the previous phrase should not be taken as an indicator that I am "pro-life." My purpose is to attempt to gain insight into how and why abortion is condemned.

3. Material and method

In this section I describe how the material was selected and then collected from conservative news sites. As I do not focus on all comments about abortion, I explain the criteria for including comments for analysis into a small corpus. Then, some methods used beyond observing simple frequencies are shortly discussed (e.g. correlations between words and word-types).

3.1. Material

The material I use is comments collected from various American conservative online news outlets. Each website's commenting platform allows their readers to create a username under which they can post comments relating to any news or opinion articles. Users are also able to reply to each other's contributions. The material, then, represents one type of computer-mediated communication which can have important differences compared to other registers such as face-to-face discussions (Ho, 2008). These are considered in Section 5.1.

The online media outlets chosen for this study are *Breitbart*, *The Daily Wire*, *The Washington Times*, and *The Western Journal*. Each of them self-identifies as a conservative news site, but the political leanings of some of these outlets were also

checked from a Pew report (Pew Research Center, 2014, p. 9) and from the online source *Media Bias/Fact Check* (Van Zandt, 2015-). These particular sites were selected from a larger set of conservative news outlets based on their activity: the more people that leave comments in articles, the easier it is to collect a sufficient amount of data.

A total of 400 comments were collected to build a very *specialized* small corpus (Baker, 2006, p.26), as I am attempting to capture a highly specific type of discourse. First, from each newspaper, the 20 newest articles tagged in the website's abortion category were selected. *The Washington Times* had no such category, but their site enables the user to perform a Google-search on their site with any keyword. The first 20 articles that the search returned for the keyword *abortion* written in 2019 were selected. Then, each article from each site was numbered from 1 to 20. The random number generator at <https://www.random.org/> was used to randomly choose 10 articles from each paper. Opinion articles were included, because the genre is not likely to affect the style of condemnation in the comments relevant to this study.

Second, in every article, comments were sorted based on date (from newest to oldest). The first 10 comments that described abortion in a negative fashion were chosen for analysis. *Negativity* is, admittedly, a concept always subject to differing interpretations, and therefore I also included any ambiguous cases (I will further discuss this in Section 5.1). These amounted to 9 and I decided to ignore them because there were so few, and because I did nonetheless include other comments that were clearly condemnatory but did not neatly fit the criterion of negative description. Subsequent comments in any article by the same user were also discarded. These amounted to 26. Also, articles discussing abortion rights at all stages of pregnancy were discarded, since my purpose was to focus on abortion as generally as possible. Therefore the inclusion of extreme cases could distort the commenting.

If the article had 5-9 comments, they were collected and I balanced them out in subsequent articles. For example, if an article had 8 comments, I would include them and take 12 from the next so that the average per article is 10. If there were under 5 they were discarded. If the first ten articles did not yield enough comments, the remaining ten were randomized and used to collect the remaining ones. This approach was sufficient for *Breitbart* and *The Daily Wire*.

For *The Washington Times* and *The Western Journal*, the method of collection was the same until the list of the first ten articles was exhausted. Due to these news outlets' lower activity, all comments were collected from subsequent articles. If the additional articles still did not yield enough comments, the rest of them were collected in order from older articles. All selected articles are listed in Appendix B.

I do not perceive the use of this material to be ethically problematic—though it may not be totally without its issues. Those people whose comments are picked certainly did not agree to be included in a research paper, and such consent is impossible to get in any case. However as a general matter, I believe that any type of public discourse whose purpose is to be public, and in this case, is intended to be open to commentary and further discussion, should be free for analysis. If I were to analyze anyone's single comment and reply back to him, I would only be engaging in what these comment sections were designed for. Therefore analyzing these comments in a paper does not seem very much ethically distinct. Moreover, very few commenters used their real names (or rather, what *might* be someone's real name).

3.2. Method

While there are CD analysts that advocate for attention to be directed somewhat systematically at specific language features or details (see e.g. Jäger, 2001, p.55; Huckin, 2002, pp.6–10), the conception of CDA I adapt is not a *method* in and of itself (van Dijk, 2015, p.466). This is because critical analyses can focus on a wide variety of issues, and specific problems may require specific theoretical insights (Wodak, 2006, p.182). My particular approach, which is explained below, enables me to get a broad picture about how abortion and the actors involved in it are negatively represented in moral condemnation in the specific setting of online commenting on conservative websites. These representations, like “abortion is murder” or “democrats are baby murdering traitors,” do of course carry more meaning than their superficial content as mere truth-claims (see *topos of threat*: Wodak, 2001, p.75). For example, if abortion is represented as murder it may be implied that abortion ought to be outlawed, or if somebody is a baby murdering traitor it is implied that they ought to be punished. The connection of such representations to possible political implications

is further discussed in Section 5.2., because whatever language features are examined, the purpose of CDA is to discuss them with respect to social issues.

A quantitative corpus method is the obvious choice, given that I have hypothesized patterns which should be prevalent in the sample. For each comment, the following information was gathered into an excel file for ease of quantitative analysis:

- 1) Website on which the comment was left.
- 2) Article headline.
- 3) URL to article.
- 4) Username (*a* for anonymous).
- 5) Sex (0 for male, 1 for female, though due to its relatively low, ambiguous, and untrustworthy nature was mostly ignored in the analysis).
- 6) Date.
- 7) Number of upvotes/likes (ignored in the analysis).
- 8) Number of arguments against abortion which refer to negative consequences (for example the woman's regret).
- 9) Number of words.
- 10) Number of victims identified (e.g. *slaughter* vs. *babyslaughter*).
- 11) Number of perpetrators identified. The perpetrator specified was enough to be implicated and not necessary the one having the abortion, e.g. "*party* of infanticide."
- 12) Number of descriptions of abortion that may elicit disgust (e.g. "ripped to pieces and turned into bloody slush"). There were not many, and due to the rather vague and subjective nature of such expressions I will not focus on them much.
- 13) Number of expressions of disgust (e.g. *sick*, *disgusting*).
- 14) Number of indications of the commenter's view of what will or should happen to perceived perpetrators as punishment (e.g. *jail*, *hell*).
- 15) Total number of condemnations i.e. negative representations (some commenters may use several linguistic means for describing abortion).

In addition to the numerical values of 10–14, the actual linguistic expressions were gathered in separate files and the numbers of their occurrences were summed. Also,

the following counts of words used to describe abortion were listed (duplicates were ignored if they belonged to the same word class):

- a. Verbs (e.g. “woman’s right *to kill* their babies”)
- b. Adjectives (e.g. *bad*)
- c. Modifiers (e.g. “*satanic* killing of unborn children”)
- d. Nouns (e.g. “abortion is *murder*”)
- e. Action words (verbs and nouns such as *butchering*)
- f. Non-action words (adjectives and nouns such as *sin*)

Each reference to abortion was also separately listed to compare their frequencies (e.g. *murder* vs. *kill*). Finally, I observed whether or not the above word types (a-f) were used at all in the comment, 1 for yes and 0 for no. For example, the cell value for verbs would be 1 even if there were 5 verbs. This was used in anticipation that the data may become distorted if some commenters express several condemnations (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Balancing outliers.

Looking at totals, the (made up and unrealistic) example on the left may lead one to believe that people more often opt for adjectives rather than verbs in condemning abortion. To balance out deviations in order to capture how people more typically condemn, the total on the right is calculated by how many people used verbs (6) vs. adjectives (1) in the same data set.

	Verbs	Adjectives		Verbs	Adjectives
Commenter 1	1	0	Commenter 1	1	0
Commenter 2	1	0	Commenter 2	1	0
Commenter 3	1	0	Commenter 3	1	0
Commenter 4	1	0	Commenter 4	1	0
Commenter 5	2	0	Commenter 5	1	0
Commenter 6	1	12	Commenter 6	1	1
Total	7	12	Total	6	1

The comments did not need to explicitly refer to abortion—indeed, very few did. For example, *murdering children* in a comment related to abortion can hardly mean anything else. Similarly, references to people who have had abortions or support abortion rights etc. were included. For instance, if such people are referred to as *murderers*, this logically entails that abortion is conceptualized as murder, which in

turn amounts to a negative description following the operationalization used in this study. Replies to comments were ignored as I did not want to include comments influenced by previous commenters (earlier comments could also do this, but the comments that others reply to are *guaranteed* to).

My main hypothesis is that the condemnation of abortion would mostly be expressed in terms of actions. There are some cases where it is debatable whether or not the word in question actually refers to an action. Adjectives can be derived from verbs (e.g. *murdering*, *murderous*: Biber, Conrad, & Leech, 2002, p.191), and while they are descriptive words they do contain allusions to actions. Similarly, *nominalization* (ibid., pp.89–90) can be used to derive nouns from verbs, and often these nouns denote people who perform specific actions (e.g. *murderer*). In order to come up with a reasonable definition for action words that does not attempt to accommodate as many items as possible, I treated these potentially ambiguous items as non-actions. The same was done to words like *death*: even if events such as this can be regarded as something *happening*, they can be passive and not necessarily involve a perpetrator. Also, causing death to others is already described as *killing*, *murder*, etc.

By action words, then, I mean all verbs as well as nouns that denote specific types of *events*. Nouns, according to the traditional definition, identify “things” or the names of people and places (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p.29). But while nouns such as *murder* certainly refer to a *thing*, such words stand in clear distinction with other nouns like *chair*. First, the nouns I focus on are often derived from, or have corresponding, verbs. For instance, gerunds such as in “*killing* babies is not a winning issue!” were somewhat common and are nominalized from a verb by the attachment of a suffix. While this way of categorizing actions accounts for the vast majority of these lexical items in my data, it does not provide a satisfactory definition for words like *infanticide*. I therefore apply an additional semantic condition involving the roles of (human) *agents* (ibid., p.194) that perform actions and *patients* (ibid., p.53) who undergo them. Relevant to my purposes are words that require an agent *doing* something to a patient: there can be no *infanticide* or a *killing* that does not involve a perpetrator *acting* in a specific way in relation to a victim. To these items it also applies that actors are perceived as intending to reach *goals* (of victimization in this case) by their actions (Halliday, 2002, p.196).

Modifiers, or descriptions of perpetrators or victims (e.g. *evil mother, innocent baby*), were not separately listed as condemnations because my main focus is on the vocabulary concerning abortion. However, modifiers like *murderous* were treated as adjective-based condemnations: *evil* etc. can refer to anything the perpetrator does, but *murderous* is a straightforward reference to abortion. In other words, it suggests that abortion is analogous to murder, as in the case of using the word *murderer* to describe someone who has had an abortion or supports abortion rights. I also included victims and perpetrators in comments that discussed hypothetical situations because they reflect how people reason about moral issues.

Lastly, items such as *perform human sacrifice* counted as nouns, since *human sacrifice*, which is a noun, can be substituted for *abortion*. However this is a minor issue since word classes are not as important here as action words vs. non-action ones. But sometimes what could be substituted were non-actions, and I treated them as such. This was done in the spirit that the definition for actions would not be too broad. Otherwise e.g. *have/perform/commit/favor/etc. [non-action description of abortion]* would count as action condemnations which would not accurately indicate how abortion itself is thought of.

After tabling the results in Excel, logical functions were used to determine specific correlations. For example, the SUMIF function could be used to see if victims are more likely to be identified in comments which express condemnations in terms of actions as opposed to non-actions. In this case the values in the *actions used* (0/1) column can be added together conditional upon the cell value in the victim column being greater than zero. The function then yields the sum of comments where action words were used *and* which also identified victims. In addition, I used the free corpus tool *AntConc* by Laurence Anthony to perform simple word and collocation searches. For example, as my main focus was how people describe abortion, out of all adjectives I only tabled those that describe, or modify references to, the procedure. AntConc was then used later to examine modifiers of victim words as well to see if there are collocation patterns (Baker, 2006, p.95–96).

Finally, I also pay some attention to the lexical diversity in the sample, which can be used to measure the variability of the vocabulary used in condemnation. I will look at the *type-token ratio*, which is calculated by dividing the number of different words by

the total number of words in the corpus (Johansson, 2008, p.62). However, because the type-token ratio becomes less useful due to the disproportionately increasing number of grammatical words in larger corpora (Baker, 2006, p.52), I will also simply observe how frequent specific action, victim, and perpetrator words are compared to others. These measures of lexical diversity can then be used to determine how homogenous or repetitive the condemnation of abortion is in the sample.

4. Results and analysis

Here I present the results of my analysis with respect to the hypotheses sketched in Section 2: (1) abortion is more likely to be described as an action as opposed to a non-action, (2) victims are identified and likely humanized, and (3) perpetrators are identified and can be groups of people rather than those having or performing the abortion. Disgust and punishment were also observed: they are sometimes expressed and elicited in moral condemnation. In going through the results, and in all graphs, the lexical items presented are either the lemma (*murder* stands for *murder/ed/ing* etc.) or the actual referent of various expressions (*Democrats* includes *demoncrats*, *party of death*, etc.). In other words, the item shown stands for everything that refers to it, regardless of the exact form. I use underlining to highlight words in all examples.

4.1. General characteristics of the corpus

The corpus consists of 365 comments. Out of the original 400, 26 were discarded because they were left by commenters I had already included in the sample, and 9 others were discarded because I classified them as ambiguous (examples 1 and 2 below).

- (1) If you think abortion is good you're a psychopath.
- (2) It is shameful that abortion proponents use the tragedy of rape and incest as the justification to keep abortion readily available for convenience and profit.

Comments like these were excluded because I wanted to have as clear a definition of negativity as possible. It does seem reasonable to assume that both of these comments are in fact condemnatory. However, to be exact, in (1) what is condemned is *thinking that abortion is good*, which does not necessarily amount to condemning abortion itself as morally objectionable. Similarly, in (2), abortion could be acceptable or morally neutral, but *not for convenience and profit*, and not using these particular justifications.

The total number of words in the corpus is 17589, which makes the average length of a comment only 48 words. Other measurements further indicate that comment length is typically short in the sample. The median length is 30 words, 65% of comments had 50 words or less, and 88% of comments had 100 words or less. The longest comment had 283 words. I of course selected only specific kinds of comments as data, but these observations are roughly in line with the general style of commenting: for instance, in Freund's (2011, p.20) sample of comments left on a news website, 75% of them had 102 words or less. The type-token ratio for the whole corpus was low at 0.18 (the value ranges from 0 to 1), but lexical diversity is examined below in more detail. Finally, male usernames were more frequent than female usernames (77 vs 16).

4.2. Action and non-action

Out of all 483 condemnations, 378 were action-based (78%). In order to balance out any comments that included several condemnations, I checked how many comments used at least one action item. Out of the eligible 365 comments, 301 did so (82%). Moreover, the proportion of condemnations that used *only* action words was 71%. Action words, then, were clearly the preferred strategy in expressing moral judgments, which is in line with what was expected based on my framework. The anticipation that condemnations of abortion would primarily be expressed in terms of action words as opposed to non-action words was based on the theory that morality enables us to coordinate behavior based on mutual representations of condemnable actions—especially unambiguous ones (for instance, *punching* is more definite than *hurting*).

Lexical diversity was low with respect to the action items used. The stems *kill* and *murder* were equally (133 vs. 134) common, together comprising 71% of all action words (*kill* was more common as a verb, and *murder* as a noun). This leaves the

occurrence of all other items miniscule: *infanticide*, *slaughter*, and *genocide* were the next most common stems comprising 4%, 3.4% and 2.4% of all, respectively (see Figure 1 below). As expected, this distribution somewhat differs from baseline data acquired from the Corpus of Contemporary American English, *COCA* (Davies, 2008- : Figure 2).⁷ The differences seem to result quite straightforwardly from the specialized nature of my data: the higher occurrence of *infanticide* is not surprising if fetuses are seen as human entities, and the same applies to the higher occurrence of *murder* (this is further discussed in the next section on victims).

Figure 1. Ten most common action items.

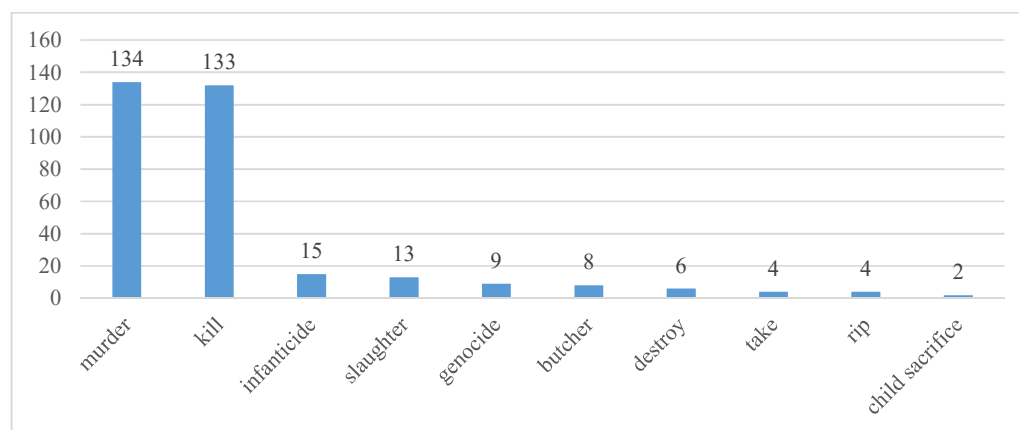
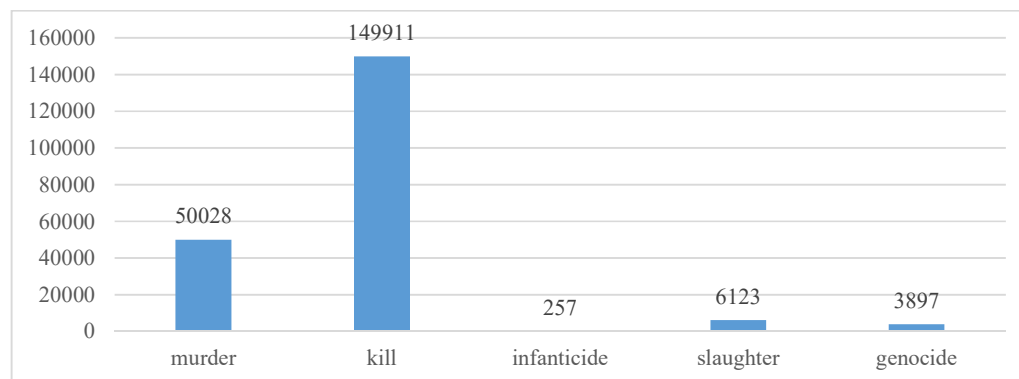


Figure 2. Frequencies of the top five action items in COCA.



⁷ Searches for *murder*, *kill*, and *slaughter* were performed using the lemma and attaching the tags *_v** and *_nn** to include only verbs and nouns, e.g. *murder*_v**. Then, non-actions such as *murderer(s)* and *slaughterhouse(s)*, were subtracted from the number. I only used these five items because they are the most relevant, and due to the specialized nature of my corpus more meaningful comparisons would require context filtration (e.g. *take* would have over 600,000 instances and *take a life* only 121).

The most common action items used also appear to conform to the idea that condemnations may appeal to “Rawlsian” precepts (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2013, p.488), which relate to prohibiting actions that everyone can be a victim of. This was because if the condemner manages to link (in this case) *abortion* with *murder* in the listeners’ minds, it could lead to increased condemnation or moral persuasion since murder is already very likely condemned. Of course, it is unclear and possibly quite unlikely that such strategies are effective, but this is irrelevant when commenters aim to only signal their views. In addition to *murder*, *kill* is also a Rawlsian violation in the above sense, but the large difference in frequency to e.g. *slaughter* also seems fairly explainable by the distribution in the general corpus.

Nouns were more common than verbs, which appears to be best explained by the use of gerunds. For instance, *murdering* and *killing* were commonly used as nouns (see examples 3 and 4), though they are identical to the present participle forms of verbs. For one, given their appearance, these gerunds may be intuited as verbs. But what is more relevant is that these items refer to actions regardless of word class.

- (3) Murdering unborn babies is "reproductive health." Love is hate. War is peace.
- (4) For pro abortion liberals, an unborn child occupies about the same moral status as a stalk of celery. Killing an unborn child, for them, is about as significant as tossing a toothpick out your car window.

Non-action words were somewhat rare: they comprised 20% of all condemnations, and 23% of comments used them at least once. 12% of comments used only non-action words. Nouns were slightly more prevalent than adjectives (57% vs. 43% of all non-action items), but given the small sample of 96 non-action items it is difficult to say if there is a genuine difference. Action words were still slightly more common than non-action words even if erasing the effect of *kill* and *murder*.

Evil was the most common non-action item at 13 instances, sometimes used as a noun and sometimes as an adjective (examples 5 and 6).

- (5) Killing the unborn is depraved-indifference murder, but, as we know, it's an evil we condone...
- (6) Taking the life of an unborn child for the sake of your personal convenience is evil and selfish.

Interestingly, the next most common words were *death*, *killer*, *murderer*, and *murderous*. This shows that even though treated as non-actions, these items definitely contain allusions to actions (with the possible exception of *death*: see examples 7–10). This leaves “pure” non-action condemnations with an almost non-existent prevalence at 1%. The explicit condemnation *wrong* only occurred twice (example 11).

- (7) Next up, the musical comedy, "Death of a Baby." (In article B2 about Hollywood depicting abortions.)
- (8) Defund the baby killers
- (9) ANYONE who believes abortion of fetuses after hearing a heartbeat is JUST PLAIN SICK AND DISGUSTING AND IS A MURDERER, PLAIN AND SIMPLE!!!
- (10) Well done Governor and those that supported the bill. The tide is turning For "LIFE" Against the murderous demoncrats
- (11) Killing Innocent Babies is wrong.

In summary, action words dominate descriptions of abortion.⁸ Adjectives were rare, and this is not explained by them being used as modifiers: for example, in “the *horrible* murder of babies,” *horrible* would not count as an adjective-based condemnation, but only as a modifier of an action condemnation. However only 8% of comments used such modifiers, and therefore the balance against noun/verb-based condemnations would not be significantly swayed even if they were treated as adjective-based. Action words, then, seem to be not only the intuitive means of condemnation but a sufficient one.

4.3. Victims

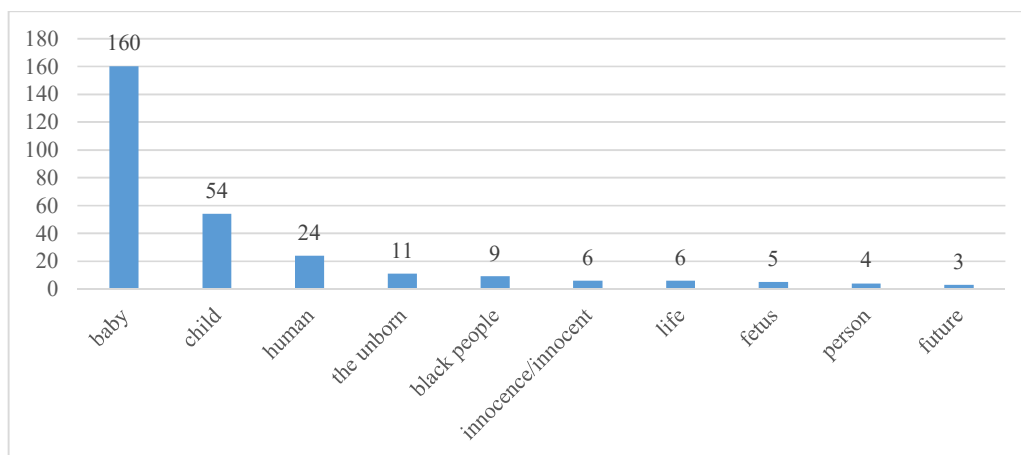
Victims were identified in 66% of all condemnations. Again, to correct for the effect of possible outliers, I examined how many comments identified at least one victim. The proportion was somewhat higher at 77% of all comments. These results are in line

⁸ One might note that the phrase “abortion/it is murder/ing” is a kind of meme that is repeated for the sake of repetition, and this could be distorting the sample. However the utterance occurs only 17 times in the corpus. Insofar that is a commonly adapted expression, it may also be worthwhile to think about *why* it has caught on as opposed to other possible phrases (e.g. “abortion is *evil*”).

with the observation that reasoning about moral judgment generally involves perceiving victims (DeScioli, Gilbert, & Kurzban, 2012). Moreover, since moral condemnation aims to coordinate action in favor of a victim, I anticipated that identifying them is crucial in linguistic signaling (though the actors involved in reasoning processes may not always be totally congruent with language use: see p.36 below on *murder* and *kill*). In order to see if the perception of actions is associated with victim identification, I checked how many action vs. non-action condemnations involve victims. There turned out to be no glaring difference: 82% of action condemnations had victims, and for non-actions the proportion was 72%. This could be taken to suggest that identifying victims is necessary to justify wrongness judgments regardless of the manner of condemnation.

As was the case for action vocabulary, the lexical diversity of victim items was also low (see Figure 3). *Baby* accounted for 50% of all victims and *child* for 17%. *Human* was the third most common at 8%. As expected, there were only a few (5) instances of *fetus*. *Embryo* did not occur at all. Victims were anticipated to be strategically elevated, in the case of abortion by means of *humanization*: victimizing an embryo is difficult, since they are not very developed. However if the notion of *baby*, for instance, is successfully stretched to accommodate embryos as well, it can be used in pointing to more plausible victims. Accordingly, the top three items, which constitute 75% of all, were explicitly human.

Figure 3. Ten most common victim items.



The potentially curious victim item *black people* is usually associated with the claim that abortion rights supporters and Planned Parenthood⁹ have racist motivations because a disproportionate number of abortions are had by African Americans (examples 12–14 below).

- (12) Every year, abortion mills slaughter over a million (mostly black) babies in the U.S.
- (13) Abortion is legalized ethnic cleansing facilitated by illegal government funding. The left's racism has been disguised as healthcare to blacks and the poor and they bought into it hook, line and sinker. Dumb sheep.
- (14) The abortion industry and modern Democrat Party are doing what the old time Democrat Party and KKK would never have had the guts to do--exterminate blacks on a wide-scale basis.

A collocation analysis was performed with AntConc to see if the status of victims was further highlighted by the use of modifiers. Since *baby* and *child* comprised the majority of victim words, I checked which modifiers were most commonly used for them. The most common modifier was *unborn* at 33 instances (which is not necessarily an evaluative word), and the next common one was *innocent* at only 15 occurrences. A simple search for *innocent* yielded 31 hits, therefore modifying only 10% of victim items at most (because some *innocents* were victims and not only modifiers). Other empathic modifiers like *vulnerable* and *helpless* were only used once. Perhaps surprisingly, then, using descriptive words for victims in an attempt to create impact did not seem to be a common strategy—as was also the case for action words.

Finally, it seems intuitive that some action concepts relate to condemnation more straightforwardly than others. As an example, it would be expected that *murder*, on its own without specifying victims, is likely to be more sufficient to signal condemnation as opposed to *kill*. This is because the concept of *murder* specifically refers to killing humans, but *kill* relates to any living being at all. The collocates of these words show this: the number of the top three victims used in the vicinity of *kill* were 130 as opposed to 71 for murder. This suggests that there is a disconnection between cognitive moral

⁹ Planned Parenthood is a partially government-funded reproductive health care organization that provides, amongst other things, abortion services.

templates and the manner in which people condemn, because victim (as well as perpetrator) identification can be to some degree dependent upon which *words* are used to condemn regardless of the moral offense (*murder* and *purposefully killing a human* are roughly semantically identical). The previous also explains in part the somewhat low victim identification rate for condemnations at 66%. Presumably, the rate would have been even lower if people had only used *murder* instead of *kill* due to the redundancy of pointing to a human victim.

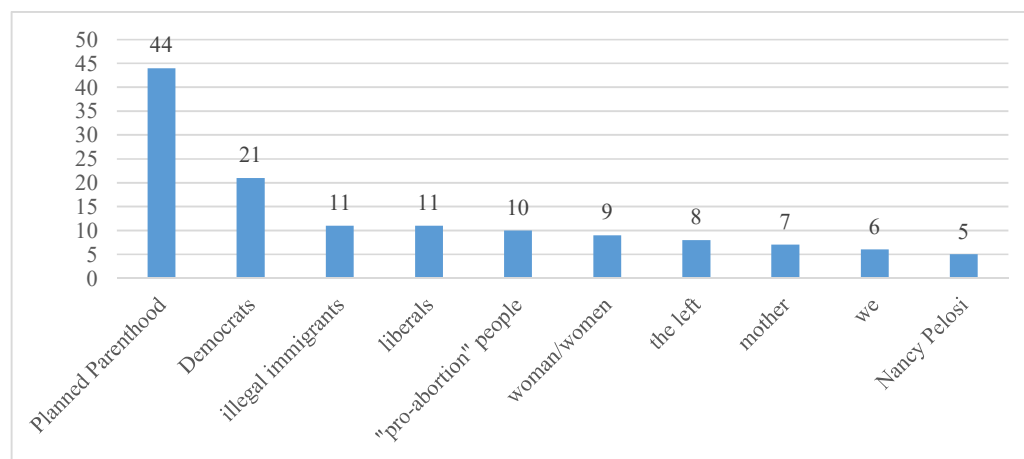
4.4. Perpetrators

Perpetrators were identified in 43% of condemnations and 53% of comments identified at least one perpetrator. Following the same logic as with victims, moral transgressions were expected to invoke pointing to perpetrators in order to coordinate action, but the differences to the victim identification rates are notable. Consonant with victims, action vocabulary was not linked to increased identification: 54% of action condemnations involved perpetrators vs. 59% for non-action.

Planned Parenthood (including its *leaders, presidents, heads, etc.*) comprised 21% of all perpetrators, followed by 10% for *Democrats* (examples 15–18). These top two items did not dominate the sample to quite the extent seen in the case of actions and victims, but still the lexical diversity appears rather low (see Figure 4 below).

Figure 4. Ten most common perpetrator items.

Ambiguous items (26 instances), such as *they*, were not included when it was unclear what or who they refer to.



- (15) Keep it up Planned Murderhood.
- (16) Planned SlaughterHouse bemoans his birth ... One got away from us.
- (17) Liberals & demoncRATS are willing to murder innocent humans simply based on their location. Inside the womb = property to sell. Outside the womb = live baby unless you live in New York.
- (18) The Democratic Party has long been the party of abortion, the party of death.

The relatively low number of perpetrators is surprising given that, in hindsight, I would have also expected that articles concerning the actions of Planned Parenthood, specific politicians, etc. could have predisposed the commenter to point to these agents. My results do not take this into account, but there appear to be some signs of a modest effect of this sort. I performed a word search (*planned*) in AntConc to see which articles had the most comments referring to Planned Parenthood. In the top five articles, there were 6, 3, 3, 2, and 2 mentions of the organization. The 1st, 4th, and 5th articles mentioned Planned Parenthood in the headline.

If the effect is real, it means that perpetrators are, in a way, even rarer than they seem because the perpetrators would tend to appear in the comments of articles which have already specified them for commenters. This implies that people do not spontaneously point to perpetrators as often as would be anticipated based on my framework. It is somewhat difficult to account for this observation. One complication is that while the vast majority of victim items refer to the fetus, the perpetrators can range all the way from the *doctor* performing the abortion, the *woman* deciding to have one, the *organization* providing the service, or the *party* supporting the woman's right to terminate the pregnancy. This suggests that unequivocal perpetrator identification can be difficult to achieve when the moral transgression is the result of a wide causal web of agents.

Nonetheless, given the idea that “[m]oral representations include *a perpetrator* and *a victim*” (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2013, p.485, emphasis original), I further examined the connection of these two. It turned out that 43% of all comments identified victims *and* perpetrators, and 53% of all comments that identified victims also identified perpetrators. However, 80% of all comments that identified perpetrators also identified victims, suggesting that victims are more closely connected to moral signaling. While it cannot be said that the roughly 50% identification rate for perpetrators is small per

se, moral condemnation appears to more strongly drive victim determination in my data.

I observed in the previous section that the word used to condemn can affect victim identification because a victim is already included in the definition of the word *murder*. This means that perpetrators should not show an effect, and they do not. The lemmas *murder* and *kill* yield an equal number of perpetrators¹⁰ at 44 and 46 instances using the top four items *Planned Parenthood*, *Democrats*, *illegal immigrants*, and *liberals*. But just as intuitively, it seems that in order to determine that an action is wrong it is not required that one is able to point to a perpetrator. Therefore the lower rate of perpetrator identification can reflect that it is irrelevant for justifications to include them: abortion is judged to be wrong because it kills a human regardless of *who* does it.

4.5. Disgust, punishment, consequences, and other minor observations

In this sample, both disgust elicitation and expression were rare, and many of the elicitations were uttered by the same commenter. Elicitation and expression were found in only 2% and 4% of all comments, respectively, and due to their low occurrence cannot be meaningfully analyzed. According to my data, disgust appears to be *somehow* implicated in moral condemnation—but while it may be involved in moral reasoning, it does not commonly reach spontaneous verbal signaling. The disgust expression stems were *sick*, *disgust*, and *repulse*. Some examples of disgust elicitation are shown below (one commenter also included a link to a graphic illustration of abortion):

- (19) The same people who get all [torqued] out of shape (and rightly so) about an animal being mistreated, seem to have no problem with a baby being sliced apart alive by [a] razor sharp [curette] or ripped to pieces and turned into bloody slush by the tube of a vacuum pump inserted next to their desperately struggling body.

¹⁰ Because perpetrators may often be identified further away from the action word than victims, I used a wide range of 20L–20R in AntConc’s collocation search. The precise numbers for *murder/kill* are: *Planned Parenthood* 11/5, *Democrats* 18/17, *illegal immigrants* 7/4, and *liberals* 8/20.

- (20) Pulling a baby out of the womb piece by piece is nothing but murder, no matter how you try to sugar coat it.

What counts as disgust elicitation is of course difficult to define precisely, and how sensitive people are to disgust will vary. However due to there being very few instances of elicitation it will not be useful to try to iron this out any further.

With respect to punishment, no commenters expressed their willingness to personally punish perpetrators. A total of only 21 commenters thought that there should or will be punishment, amounting to 6% of all comments. Some suggestions for punishment were *jail* (3) and *charge with murder* (3). Most of the rest invoked religious ideas like *hell* (6) and *Judgment Day* (4): see examples 21 and 22 below. Again, the lack of these items makes it difficult to say much about them beyond the fact that religiosity is associated with anti-abortion attitudes in general (Minkenberg, 2002; Hyne, 2015).

- (21) Murdering babies is genocide. He will burn in hell forever, so says the lord God.
- (22) any society that thinks that killing [its] most vulnerable people is the pinnacle of [its] progress, has clearly lost [its] ways and mind, and deserve no mercy on "judgment day" .

There were 11 comments which condemned abortion by referring to negative consequences, though these comments also often utilized action vocabulary. Sometimes it is suggested that these consequences apply to the women having abortions (example 23), but they can also be thought of concerning the fetus or society itself (example 24). The scarcity of consequentialist condemnations makes sense given that actions are privileged as heuristics in making moral judgments, and because people are not expected to put significant effort into persuasive arguments when the audience is already likely to agree (see also p.45 on computer-mediated communication).

- (23) If a conscience ever surfaces, their greatest difficulty is accepting responsibility and finding a way to forgive (live with) themselves. They will never stop wondering who that individual baby would have become; especially if they subsequently have other children.

- (24) The arguments against abortion are too numerous to state here, but in short these people defend a practice that is to the harm of not only the unborn child, but also to society and especially to the women they profess to be helping.

There were also 5 other types of comments that were condemnatory but did not use the kind of means for condemnation that fit into my most salient categories. In other words, they may, for example, directly express an attitude without substituting *abortion* or equating it with negative expressions (example 25).

- (25) I hate abortion and would abhor the taxpayer paying for one no matter if a citizen or an alien.

While I did not intend to focus on aspects unrelated to condemnation, I nonetheless happened to notice that in some cases the level of condemnation may be shifted depending on *who* were having the abortions. Comments in articles about illegal immigrants' abortion rights often appeared to have a different tone: usually comments were almost uniformly condemnatory, but in the case of illegal immigrants some were in favor of abortion. I went back to article B9 (see Appendix B) which had comments such as the following:

- a) YES!!!! Abortion for illegals!!! I support this. Welcome to America! The price of your invasion is your children.
- b) Medical care - absolutely NOT! Abortions - absolutely yes.
- c) Abortion for Spanish Invaders? For once we agree.
- d) Actually, I agree with her. We need to put a [Planned Parenthood] clinic in every mosque.
- e) With this one I agree!

These comments were found within the first 25, but because statements of this sort were not systematically analyzed I cannot claim that this is a genuine effect. However this could be a case where attitudes shift: babies' lives might cease to be of importance if there is dislike towards specific kinds of babies. This may be connected to free-rider aversion. Insofar as illegal immigrants are seen as a group that on the whole drains national resources, providing tax-funded services to them could trigger the *cheater detection* module discussed in Section 2 (Hart, 2013). It is, of course, important to keep in mind that I cannot know what these particular commenters generally think

about abortion, and therefore cannot claim that they are inconsistent with respect to opposing it.

5. Discussion

This section recapitulates the main results and compares them to previous findings about abortion discourse. I also consider some crucial limitations, e.g. with respect to generalizability and how well the EP framework can be used to make predictions about the specifics of language use. Finally, as this is a CDA study, I deal with some social implications that may arise from an evolutionary understanding of our moral biases.

5.1. Summary of results, relation to previous research, and limitations

This paper set out to combine theoretical and empirical developments in evolutionary and moral psychology with a critical discourse analytic framework. Knowledge about the organization of human moral cognition was used to formulate ideas about what the condemnation of abortion should look like. Due to the political divide, the connection of conservatism and anti-abortion attitudes (Pew Research Center, 2017), and some previous general impressions, the comment sections of American conservative news outlets were chosen as the source of material. This study was situated in the larger framework of CDA because I believe that, as a social approach, the discipline can benefit from analyses being informed by an understanding of evolved human psychology. This will be discussed later in the section.

Given the idea that human moral cognition implements a template that requires a wrong *action* committed against a *victim* by a *perpetrator*, I expected that spontaneous verbal condemnation would reflect this pattern. To a large extent—at least in the case of abortion in the comment sections of conservative news sites—it appears to. Condemnations were mostly expressed in terms of actions: 82% of all comments utilized action vocabulary. Abortion was usually conceptualized as an act of *murder* or *killing*, and it seems that these action items were almost sufficient across the board.

They comprised 71% of all action words, and actions were rarely (8% of the time) modified. Only 23% of comments used non-action condemnations, and roughly one half of these also referred to actions. Moreover, non-action items often alluded to actions (e.g. *killer, murderous*).

The vast majority of victim items referred to the fetus as explicitly human: the top three items *baby, child, and human* comprised 75% of all. Victims were also identified in 77% of comments. Perhaps surprisingly, using a collocate analysis looking at the modifiers of *baby* and *child* as a proxy, it appeared that victim status was only seldom highlighted (e.g. *innocent baby*). Perpetrators were identified moderately less often in 53% of all comments. Moreover, they (e.g. *Planned Parenthood*) were sometimes pointed to in the headlines of articles which probably affects perpetrator identification in the comments. That does not necessarily mean that had not these perpetrators been mentioned in the headline the commenters would not identify a perpetrator at all. Nonetheless there was a perceptible difference between victim vs. perpetrator identification, and perpetrators also demonstrated somewhat higher lexical diversity. I speculated that this may be due to a coordination difficulty which arises from the perception that several perpetrators play a causal role in affecting (in most cases) a single unambiguous victim. It could also be that the justifications given for the wrongness of specific actions require that one is able to point to a victim, and that perpetrator identification is less relevant for this purpose. In other words the action is wrong regardless of who does it, but it is not irrelevant who is potentially victimized by it. Finally, disgust elicitation, expression, and references to punishment were observed, but they played a merely miniscule role in condemnation.

Overall, the style of condemnation in my sample was highly homogenous. Abortion, according to most of the data, was thought of as the *murdering* or *killing* of a *baby* or *child* enabled by *Planned Parenthood* or *Democrats*. This is in line with Dillon's (1993) finding that both pro-life and pro-choice arguments given by their respective organizations are of low argumentative complexity.¹¹ It might be reasonable to assume

¹¹ Argumentative complexity was measured by *differentiation* and *integration*: “[d]ifferentiation refers to the number of dimensions or aspects to the question that are taken into consideration...and integration refers to the extent to which conceptual connections are developed among the differentiated dimensions of judgment” (Dillon, 1993, pp.305–6). For example, an argument can differentiate the involvement of

that most of the commenters would describe themselves as pro-life at least if forced to identify with one or the other position. If that is accurate, my data taken as a whole would certainly indicate low complexity in that there are only few dimensions taken into account in condemnation, especially with respect to actions and victims. This does not, however, provide us with information about the complexity of other possible pro-life views (see e.g. Marquis, 1989). In fact it might be difficult to even consider these online comments as proper arguments.

The lack of complexity was also observed on twitter by Sharma et al. (2017). One of the major themes in their sample was “Abortion is murder” in which the top words were *kill*, *murder*, *wrong*, *life* and *baby*. A similar pattern can be seen in my data as well, since *kill*, *murder*, and *baby* were the top three words used in condemnations. O’Rourke (2016) and Bourgeois (2013) both pointed out that pro-life discourse in Australia and Canada does not take into account the female perspective in pregnancy, but rather highlights the status of the fetus as a *person: a baby, child, or human*. This, too, is confirmed by my data as these were the top three victim words used.

One element that appears to be at the heart of the abortion debate as described in this paper is the personhood of the fetus. The effect of humanization was even tested by Mikołajczak & Bilewicz (2015) and it was found that the choice of word (*child/fetus*) can affect decision making with respect to the permissibility of abortion. But importantly the humanization of the fetus is not necessarily only a device used by those leaning towards the pro-life position. It may reflect a conceptualization process that translates to real behavior: some women reported that they were able to go through with abortion only after perceiving the fetus as non-human (Kirkman, 2011, p.125).

The fact that the discourse I focused on is computer-mediated can affect some of the language characteristics I observed. For one, while anonymity in discussions can have some positive effects (like increased participation), it can also cause disinhibition, polarization of and conformity to the views in the community, and encourage extreme or unkind expression of opinions (Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic, 2004, pp.62–64; Ho, 2008, p.194). To some degree, these could be connected to the harshness of the

a fetus and a woman in abortion, and then integrate the concept of *rights*: how to find balance between the fetus’s right to live and the woman’s right to make decisions about her own body?

vocabulary used because the social cues that can inhibit aggressive and impolite behavior are missing in this online setting (Ho, 2008, pp.200–1; Neurauter-Kessels, 2011, p.199). Similarly, if online commenting as a medium somehow influences conformity of views among the likeminded, this can be reflected in the homogeneity of condemnation styles. Homogeneity and the lack of persuasive efforts (e.g. short comments, little focus on consequentialist arguments, harsh style) in my data is also consonant with an earlier finding that people's purpose in comment sections is to mainly publicize their attitudes while interaction with others is not as important (Freund, 2011, pp.27–32). The online environment also makes trusting the sex indicated by the commenter's username difficult, and due to this I will not discuss the apparent difference between men's and women's commenting frequencies (usernames are not verified in any way, women could be more likely to comment anonymously, etc.).

Finally, there are some limitations that need to be addressed. My purpose was to study how abortion is morally condemned. However because condemnation is very rarely expressed explicitly I used *negativity* as a proxy: comments that described abortion in a negative fashion (explicitly, by substitution, etc.) were included for analysis. But negativity faces a similar issue. *Negative* typically means something undesirable, and murders, killings, infanticide, etc. usually are. However there is no satisfying way to unequivocally determine what is *always* undesirable or negative, and negativity is, neither, explicitly stated. I will have to assume that the reader will simply agree with me about the negativity of the descriptions I have focused on. Otherwise singling out any subset of comments from the set of all comments based on virtually any semantic criterion seems decidedly impossible.

Another issue was the anonymity of commenters. *The Washington Times* and *The Western Journal* do not require readers to comment under a username and in fact 60% of the analyzed comments were anonymous. Therefore I could not exclude all possible subsequent comments left by the same person. Assuming the same rate of duplicate users that was observed when people posted under a username, I should expect another 12 comments to be ineligible for analysis. This only amounts to 3.3% of the analyzed comments, which is insignificant and would not affect the results. However it is very difficult to assess what the actual number of duplicate users would be because I simply

cannot know. It is even possible that some commenters posted several comments under different usernames.

Though the data was collected from conservative news outlets, I do not believe it can be straightforwardly extrapolated to represent conservatives or those identifying as pro-life, nor their arguments. These comments only reflect spontaneous reactions (which is of course what I set out to study), *not* careful reasoning processes. There could also be selection effects of some kinds: for example, people with a different commenting or condemnation style may not be motivated to leave comments in the first place (for whatever reason).

Because I only studied spontaneous reactions, it is also unclear to what degree this data can be taken to be representative of moral reasoning itself. As far as I can tell, there has not been almost any work combining EP with discourse studies, and EP very rarely—if at all—considers language use in the manner that would be immediately relevant to CDA (manipulation, persuasion, emphasis, omission, nominalization, presupposition, etc.: see contents in e.g. Dunbar & Barrett, 2007; Buss, 2016a; 2016b). Therefore, as a general matter, it seems that not a lot is known about the link between discourse and cognition, and how they translate to behavior and thus cause social effects (though Hart, 2011; 2013 have initiated this work). I assumed that how human moral cognition functions would, to some degree, be manifest in language use. That assumption rested on the straightforward idea that in order to coordinate action (especially *before* a conflict), we must use linguistic means to signal our views and affect the views of others. However because my focus was narrower than people's condemnation style generally, there is some disconnection: I did not aim to capture action words as such, but rather those action words that are used to describe abortion or can be substituted for it. Therefore e.g. “do something so horrible [an abortion]” would count as non-action in my analysis although *doing* clearly refers to action. Similarly, words like *murder* can perhaps often be used without explicit reference to victims and perpetrators because they might be implicitly assumed. In other words the way we make sense of such words in the first place could be by expecting victims and perpetrators to be involved. Thus, even if cognitive moral templates require victims, they are not necessarily identified when people talk (as opposed to reason) about moral judgments.

5.2. Biology in being critical

It is not a new idea that understanding our moral selves as creations of biological forces might help us grasp and solve social problems (Alexander, 1985, p.17). Given the acute social and political nature of CDA, one might expect that such understanding would be highly relevant. After all, it seems rather obvious that in order to meaningfully address social issues—which fundamentally consist in human behavior—one needs to actually understand human behavior. By looking at not only surface level linguistic representations but also underneath at the machinery generating them, we may observe that what we believe is *right* may only be a way to coalign with likeminded others; we may be biased to focus on action rather than inaction or consequences; we may strategically humanize or even invent victims; we may blame whole groups for the transgressions of only some of their members; and in whatever way we utilize these tactics could be motivated at least in part by self-interest rather than legitimately ethical considerations. CDA has seemingly been slow to integrate sciences of the mind to the study of discourse with few exceptions (Hart, 2005, p.189; Chilton, 2005, pp.22–24; Wodak, 2006, p.181), which could hinder its explanatory powers. But a more fundamental point is that CD analyses themselves could be motivated by self-interest instead of noble and selfless pursuits for social equality. Recall that there is no reason to expect that following our moral intuitions leads to a better world for everyone (they could do the opposite¹²), because they were not designed for that purpose in the first place. It is not obvious why we should assume that CD analysts are different type of people whose political interests are not self-serving. Only focusing on *discourse*, and not people, then, may not be the most efficient way of inducing the kind of social change CDA should be aiming at.

My analysis (and the previous research I reviewed) shows that abortion is conceptualized as a wrongful act of killing against a human entity—at the very least in some conservative or pro-life circles. I do not make claims about what kind of social effects (if any) are potentially brought about by this discourse. But because people are highly motivated to debate abortion, it could be worthwhile to think about better and worse ways to change other people's minds. It may be tempting to attempt to show

¹² For instance, moral rules that enforce group loyalty in tribal warfare can enable a band to coordinate successfully against another, i.e. kill the men and capture the women (Pinker, 1997, pp.513–516).

what is incorrect about definitively linking fetuses to humans, abortion to murder, and murder to wrongness. One might also try to argue that abortion is not murder, since the concept of murder appears to drive much of condemnation. But is *reasoning* an effective means of changing minds in this case? We saw that anti-choice women can find abortion acceptable due to self-interest (Wiebe et al., 2005). I made the preliminary and limited observation that abortion can be seen as a good thing by some (presumably) conservatives if done by illegal immigrants. Just over half of those who identify as pro-life believe that abortion should be permitted when the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest (Gallup, 2019)—though whatever causes a pregnancy seems irrelevant when condemnation is based on the perception that abortion is the murder of a baby. This last observation is also interesting in that pro-life people will be more accepting of abortion when it is the result of *involuntary* sex, suggesting again that opinions about abortion are associated with mating behavior (Kurzban, 2010, p.194). Attitudes, then, can change. But change, at least in these cases, does not appear to be driven by ethical reason.

Whether or not the type of discourse I have displayed here is effective in furthering the pro-life political goals, the goals are still there nonetheless. Of course, it is difficult to talk about the exact political aims of a collective because people within it will not necessarily align with respect to their opinions. Some may only want to use persuasive means to decrease the abortion rate while keeping it legal (by, for example, showing pregnant women their ultrasound images: Silverstein, 2010, pp.3–4). But some do want to ban the procedure or at least not support its availability. Quite paradoxically, those who benefit from access to abortion services may also be opposed to them, which could have political implications:

The fact that some women who have had abortions do not believe that other women should be allowed to have abortions might explain the difficulty in achieving widespread support for continuing access to abortion services in North America. (Wiebe et al., 2005, p.250)

It may seem reasonable that if some people truly see abortion as the murder of a baby they would want to criminalize the procedure in an attempt to reduce its frequency. It appears questionable, however, that criminalization would be an effective means for

that purpose. Legal restrictions are *not* associated with fewer abortions, and indeed more permissive legislation coincides with lower abortion rates (Sedgh et al., 2008; Wise, 2018¹³). This does not necessarily mean that abortion rates would not decrease as the result of criminalization. But even if legal restrictions lowered the rate of abortion, that has to be placed in juxtaposition with the adverse effects: restrictions are associated with more health risks which translate to substantial health care costs and even deaths (WHO, 2019). These issues should be relevant to anybody trying to increase the collective well-being of any society.

If it is the case that restricting abortion rights would not lead to a lower abortion rate—and especially if it would increase—the worry about *babies* being *murdered* would no longer be a valid justification for criminalization. However, if the real reason for anti-abortion attitudes is (influenced by) something else, those people would nonetheless want the procedure outlawed. This is because banning abortion would still be a way inflict punishment on perceived moral transgressors. The justifications given would have to change, though, in order to remain plausible. Conversely, the reasons given for the legality of abortion rarely appear to be that the costs of having sex should be as low as possible—though tax-funded and safe services combined with prevailing social acceptance would surely help. Instead, we are asked to be worried about something more humane and virtuous, like women’s freedom to choose what they do with their own bodies (see Kurzban, 2010, pp.206–17 for the fuller logic of this way of thinking). If self-interest influences or even determines our political and moral beliefs, it is not clear how effective argumentation is as long as people’s interests are not aligned.

¹³ Wise (2018) reviews a report by The Guttmacher Institute who have received funding from Planned Parenthood. While this could often be considered a warning sign of biased research, the Sedgh et al. (2008) paper nonetheless had consonant findings.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to introduce a biologically derived notion of morality to the study of discourse. My purpose was to show that morally condemnatory language would reflect the underlying details of how morality is cognitively implemented. Evolutionary theory of morality suggests that it is a device whose purpose is to coordinate action: because partisan side-taking in conflicts can increase risks for both parties, ubiquitous condemnation enables people to punish perpetrators in favor of the victim regardless of their identities. This is why I hypothesized that condemnation of abortion should be mainly expressed in terms of actions that are readily represented by the mind and which are already likely to be generally condemned. Moreover, because moral judgment templates include victims and perpetrators, victims should often be made more salient in order to further the strategic aims of condemners.

CDA approaches typically focus on analyzing language effects that are deemed counterproductive from the perspective of the analyst—or the apparent values of CDA itself—with respect to some political goal. Some analysts themselves have suggested that the claims critical analysts make about the social repercussions of language use might not always be well substantiated (Chilton, 2005; Jones, 2007). But more importantly, some portion of CDA could be seen just as motivated by self-interest as the discourses they criticize are. While I do believe that there are worse and better solutions with respect to abortion legislation, the strategic nature of moral condemnation suggests that all opinions—including those of critical analysts—should be, at least initially, considered in some measure as motivated by self-interest. This is why I decided that insofar as this paper has a real critical element to it, it does not come from advocating for political solutions. Rather, my intention was to evaluate people's views and primarily the language used, along with pointing to possible complications that may be caused by the desire to prohibit the *act* of abortion even when it can lead to detrimental consequences.

Some ideas for further research emerge here. A controlled experiment was conducted to see if attitudes towards abortion can be modulated by specific lexical choices (*child/fetus*: Mikołajczak & Bilewicz, 2015). Could attitudes be affected if abortion was described more in terms of actions than non-actions, for example when both are nonetheless condemnatory? The focus we appear to put on actions might also be taken

to suggest that abortion would be less condemned when the result of inaction—though it is quite difficult to imagine a situation like this. A simpler hypothesis could be that not having children as a life decision is less condemned than terminating a pregnancy, even when justified identically.

Attitudes may also shift based on the identity of those having abortions, but this prediction needs to be much more carefully developed than the slight observation I made about comments relating to illegal immigrants. Because restrictive legislation is not associated with lower abortion rates (Sedgh et al., 2008; Wise, 2018), but is associated with more health care costs (WHO, 2019), criminalizing abortion may not be an effective means of reducing their number. If it is true that abortion is sometimes opposed because its illegality would be a punishment to people with more promiscuous mating behaviors, criminalization would still be supported even when it does not save more fetuses. This effect and the basic features of condemnatory language I observed are expected to be similar universally, because modern humans share most of the evolutionary history during which complex adaptations developed. Therefore it would be useful for further research to address possible cultural variation and what may cause it.

Finally, it remains to be seen if disgust elicitation can be linguistically used in persuasion. For example, there appear to be some moral domains where disgust is more implicated in than anger (Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 200, p.644). Disgust elicitation has been linked to increased moral condemnation, but in the studies I have cited disgust has not been elicited linguistically. Developments like these could be used to better justify some foundational claims found in CDA—e.g. that language use has significant social effects. But as a social approach, CDA might also benefit from understanding some of the psychological motivations underlying discourse itself.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Lexical items used in condemnation.

ACTIONS

ITEM	INSTANCES
murder	134
kill	133
infanticide	15
slaughter	13
butcher	9
genocide	9
rip	4
take	4
destroy	3
destruction	3
child sacrifice	2
discard	2
eliminate	2
end	2
exterminate	2
harvest	2
hurt	2
remove	2
slice	2
suck	2
tear	2
abort	1
act	1
blood sacrifice	1
chop up	1
crush	1
deed	1
dice	1
discriminate	1
do (something so horrible)	1
do in	1
eradicate	1
ethnic cleansing	1
homicide	1

human sacrifice	1
leave (alone to die)	1
oppression	1
procedure	1
produce (baby parts)	1
pull out	1
put (to death)	1
rip apart	1
snuff out	1
spill (blood)	1
squash	1
suction	1
terminate	1
turn (into bloody slush)	1
volunteer (life)	1
wipe out	1
TOTAL	378

VICTIMS

ITEM	INSTANCES
baby	160
child	54
human	24
the unborn	11
black people	9
innocence/innocent	6
life	6
fetus	5
person	4
future	3
infant	3
people	3
woman	3
<u>ambiguous (e.g. <i>those, you</i>)</u>	2
individual	2
kid	2
offspring	2
animal	1
anything (that is young and helpless)	1
'bad decision'	1
defenseless	1

folks	1
illegal alien	1
liberals	1
minorities	1
mistake	1
mother	1
newborn	1
own progeny	1
people of color	1
poor people (of other races)	1
potential voters	1
self	1
society	1
the poor	1
the unwanted	1
themselves (the left)	1
TOTAL	319

PERPETRATORS

ITEM	INSTANCES
Planned Parenthood (incl. leader, president, head, etc.)	44
<u>ambiguous</u>	26
Democrats	21
illegal aliens	11
liberals	11
"pro-abortion" people	10
woman	9
the left	8
mother	7
we	6
Nancy Pelosi	5
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez	4
doctor	4
Ilhan Omar (Rep.)	3
America(ns)	2
communists	2
Hollywood	2
John Roberts	2
politicians	2
abortion industry	1

abortion mills	1
abortion providers	1
ACLU	1
adults	1
baby-eater	1
big money making movie companies (Disney, Netflix)	1
biological father	1
communist left	1
companies that profit from child entertainment (e.g. Disney)	1
Congresswoman	1
Dem Party leadership	1
Female impersonating dopplegangers	1
genocider	1
Marxist/Communist pro-murder bunch	1
Mr. Edwards	1
New York	1
New York's leaders	1
Ohioans	1
our government	1
parents	1
people	1
people with agendas	1
policies	1
pro-choice	1
sacrificer	1
The Modern Progressive Movement	1
the socialist	1
US Congressional Hispanic Caucus	1
Vermont	1
TOTAL	209

NON-ACTION WORDS: ADJECTIVES AND NOUNS

Adjectives

ITEM	INSTANCES
evil	8
murderous	4
baby-killing	2
disgusting	2

murdered	2
wrong	2
abhorrent	1
baby murdering	1
baby-butcher	1
bad	1
barbaric	1
blood thirsty	1
brutal	1
genocidal	1
Ghoul	1
ignorant	1
incomprehensible	1
murdering	1
not humane	1
not responsible	1
not right	1
racist	1
sad	1
selfish	1
terrible	1
vile	1
worst	1
TOTAL	41

Nouns

ITEM	INSTANCES
death	12
killer	7
murderer	6
evil	5
slaughterhouse	3
abomination	2
sin	2
animal cruelty	1
baby-eater	1
black blot	1
bloodshed	1
cruelty	1
disgrace	1
example	1
exterminator	1
fetus	1

forced-deather	1
genocider	1
hemoclysm	1
horror	1
loss (of a child)	1
madness	1
racism	1
sacrificer	1
shame	1
TOTAL	55

MODIFIERS

ITEM	INSTANCES
gruesome	3
pure	2
satanic	2
abortion	1
barbaric	1
bloody	1
cold blooded	1
deliberately	1
disgusting	1
downright	1
effectively	1
evil	1
excruciating	1
flat out	1
great (big)	1
horrendous	1
horrific	1
legalized	1
lethally	1
literally	1
monstrous	1
more	1
most	1
necessary	1
pagan	1
simple	1
societally acceptable	1
subtle	1

unfettered	1
unrepentant	1
TOTAL	34

Appendix B. Articles and URLs.

The letters in the *ARTICLE* column stands for the news site (*B* for *Breitbart*, *D* for *The Daily Wire*, *WT* for *The Washington Times*, and *WJ* for *The Western Journal*).

ARTI -CLE	URL
B1	https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2019/07/31/planned-parenthood-scolds-cnn-dnc-for-excluding-abortion-issue-during-debate/
B2	https://www.breitbart.com/entertainment/2019/07/23/nyt-hollywood-depicting-abortions-at-record-levels/
B3	https://www.breitbart.com/entertainment/2019/07/17/unplanned-opens-strong-in-theaters-across-canada-despite-being-labelled-hate-propaganda/
B4	https://www.breitbart.com/entertainment/2019/07/15/michael-moore-says-prayer-for-the-overthrow-of-trump/
B5	https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2019/07/17/report-oust-ed-planned-parenthood-head-incompetent-manager/
B6	https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2019/07/21/hispanic-caucus-trump-illegal-aliens-cancel-abortions/
B7	https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2019/07/18/sudden-ouster-of-planned-parenthood-physician-president-desperate-attempt-to-regain-political-power/
B8	https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2019/07/21/youtube-star-gamer-ninja-thanks-mom-for-choosing-life-over-abortion/
B9	https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2019/07/23/rep-ilhan-omar-calls-abortion-access-illegal-aliens/
B10	https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2019/07/16/social-justice-and-identity-politics-leader-named-planned-parenthood-acting-president/
D1	https://www.dailywire.com/news/49989/mccarthy-right-life-foundation-freedom-itself-kevin-mccarthy
D2	https://www.dailywire.com/news/49318/cineplex-chief-tells-protesters-against-pro-life-hank-berrien
D3	https://www.dailywire.com/news/49618/bovard-planned-parenthood-has-revealed-its-true-rachel-bovard
D4	https://www.dailywire.com/news/49419/watch-powerful-video-takes-pro-abortion-talking-amanda-prestigiacomio
D5	https://www.dailywire.com/news/49503/watch-famous-gamer-ninja-reveals-he-was-almost-paul-bois
D6	https://www.dailywire.com/news/50205/black-female-activist-abortion-racism-paul-bois
D7	https://www.dailywire.com/news/49195/two-independent-canadian-theater-owners-receive-paul-bois
D8	https://www.dailywire.com/news/49935/walsh-there-nothing-hypocritical-about-being-pro-matt-walsh
D9	https://www.dailywire.com/news/49946/hollywood-pushing-abortion-record-levels-paul-bois

D10	https://www.dailywire.com/news/49561/breaking-planned-parenthood-president-removed-hank-berrien
WT1	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/may/8/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-rips-georgia-heartbeat-ab/
WT2	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/may/19/alyssa-milano-abortion-boycotts-fail-gain-traction/
WT3	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/may/12/vermont-make-abortion-fundamental-right/
WT4	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/may/14/alabama-senate-passes-bill-making-abortion-felony/
WT5	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/jul/12/activists-perform-watermelon-abortion-netroots-nat/
WT6	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/feb/22/trump-admin-bars-federal-funding-abortion-clinics/
WT7	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/mar/16/new-mexico-democrats-sink-extreme-abortion-bill-af/
WT8	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/feb/7/john-roberts-joins-liberal-justices-supreme-court-/
WT9	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/feb/27/missouri-abortion-bill-126-called-strongest-pro-li/
WT10	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/jun/2/democratic-presidential-candidates-come-their-sens/
WT11	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/mar/12/abortion-is-the-social-justice-issue-of-the-millenn/
WT12	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/may/6/abortion-bills-opposed-black-hispanic-democrats/
WT13	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/jun/6/addison-woosley-13-jeered-during-anti-abortion-spe/
WT14	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/jun/3/disney-netflix-accused-hypocrisy-georgia-abortion-/
WJ1	https://www.westernjournal.com/actress-postpones-georgia-show-claims-anti-abortion-law-new-slavery/
WJ2	https://www.westernjournal.com/celebrities-protesting-georgia-abortion-laws/
WJ3	https://www.westernjournal.com/prominent-pro-lifer-perfect-response-comedian-calls-evil-piece-s/
WJ4	https://www.westernjournal.com/supreme-court-ducks-case-on-alabama-dismemberment-abortion-ban/
WJ5	https://www.westernjournal.com/court-deals-blow-abortion-industry-rules-trumps-family-planning-program/
WJ6	https://www.westernjournal.com/illegal-minors-us-custody-cant-denied-abortion-court-ruling/
WJ7	https://www.westernjournal.com/michigan-hotel-wants-help-state-women-get-abortions/
WJ8	https://www.westernjournal.com/nyt-comes-new-phrase-replace-fetal-heartbeat/
WJ9	https://www.westernjournal.com/nancy-pelosi-alabama-republicans-choose-abortion-family-member-raped/
WJ10	https://www.westernjournal.com/colorado-secretary-state-reached-planned-parenthood-help-condemning-al-abortion-law/
WJ11	https://www.westernjournal.com/ben-carson-responds-ilhan-omars-attack-uses-abortion-claims/
WJ12	https://www.westernjournal.com/jim-carreys-brutal-pro-abortion-drawing-backfires-earns-thank-pro-life-movement/
WJ13	https://www.westernjournal.com/church-vandalized-pro-abortion-graffiti-upset/
WJ14	https://www.westernjournal.com/democratic-governor-ready-break-party-lines-sign-heartbeat-bill-report/